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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*



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# The Survivor

**BY H. P. LOVECRAFT and AUGUST DERLETH**

*"Certain houses, like certain persons, manage somehow to proclaim at once their character for evil. Perhaps it is the aroma of evil deeds committed under a particular roof, long after the actual doers have passed away, that makes the gooseflesh come and the hair rise. Something of the original passion of the evil-doer, and of the horror felt by his victim, enters the heart of the innocent watcher, and he becomes suddenly conscious of tingling nerves, creeping skin, and a chilling of the blood . . ."*

—ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

I HAD never intended to speak or write again of the Charriere house, once I had fled Providence on that shocking night of discovery—there are memories which every man would seek to suppress, to disbelieve, to wipe out of existence—but I am forced to set down now the narrative of my brief acquaintance with the house on Benefit Street, and my precipitate flight therefrom, lest some innocent person is subjected to indignity by the police in an effort to explain the horrible discovery the police have made at last—that same ghastly horror it was my lot to look upon before any other human eye—and what I saw was surely far more terrible than what remained to be seen after all these years, the house having reverted to the city, as I had known it would.

While it is true that an antiquarian might be expected to know considerably less about some ancient avenues of human research than about old houses, it is surely conceivable that one who is steeped in the processes of research among the habitations of the human race might occasionally encounter a more abstruse mystery than the date of an ell or the source of a gambrel roof and find it possible to come to certain conclusions about it, no matter how incredible, how horrible or frightening or even—yes, damnable!

In those quarters where antiquarians gather, the name of Alijah Atwood is not entirely unknown; modesty forbids me to say more, but it is surely permissible to point out that anyone sufficiently interested to look up references will find more than a few paragraphs about me in those directories devoted to information for the antiquary.

I CAME to Providence, Rhode Island, in 1930, intending to make only a brief visit and then to go on to New Orleans. But I saw the Charriere house on Benefit Street, and was drawn to it as only an antiquarian would be drawn to any unusual house isolated in a New England street of a period not its own, a house clearly of some age, and with an indefinable aura that both attracted and repelled.

What was said about the Charriere house—that it was haunted—was no more than what was said about many an old, abandoned dwelling in the old world as well as in the new. Of ghosts I do not wish to write; suffice it to say that there have been within the circle of my experience certain manifestations which have lent themselves to no scientific explanation, though I am rational enough to believe that there is such explanation to be found, once man chances upon the proper interpretation through the correct scientific approach.

In that sense, surely, the Charriere house was not haunted. No spectre passed among its rooms rattling its chain, no voice moaned at midnight, no sepulchral figure appeared at the witching hour to warn of approaching doom. But that there was an aura about the house—one of evil? of terror? of hideous, eldritch things?—none could deny; and had I been born a less insensitive clod, I have no doubt that the house would have driven me forth raving out of mind. Its aura was less tangible than others I have known, but it suggested that the house concealed unspeakable secrets, long hidden from human perception. Above all else,

it conveyed an overpowering sense of age—of centuries not alone of its own being, but far, far in the past, when the world was young, which was curious indeed, for the house, however old, was less than three centuries of age.

I SAW it first as an antiquarian, delighted to discover set in a row of staid New England houses, a house which was manifestly of a seventeenth century Quebec style, and thus so different from its neighbors as to attract immediately the eye of any passerby. I had made many visits to Quebec, as well as to other old cities of the North American continent, but on this first visit to Providence, I had not come primarily in search of ancient dwellings, but to call upon a fellow antiquarian of note, and it was on my way to his home on Barnes Street that I passed the Charriere house, observed that it was not tenanted, and resolved to lease it for my own. Even so, I might not have done so, had it not been for the curious reluctance of my friend to speak of the house, and, indeed, his seeming unwillingness that I go near the place. Perhaps I do him an injustice in retrospect, for he, poor fellow, was even then on his deathbed, though neither of us knew it; so it was at his bedside I sat, and not in his study, and it was there that I asked about the house, describing it unmistakably, for, of course, I did not then know its name or anything about it.

A MAN named Charriere had owned it—a French surgeon, who had come down from Quebec. But who had built it, Gamwell did not know; it was Charriere he had known. "A tall, rough-skinned man—I saw little of him, but no one saw more. He had retired from practice," said Gamwell. He had lived there—and presumably older members of his family, though Gamwell could not say as to this—for as long as Gamwell had known the house. Dr. Charriere had lived a reclusive life, and had died, according to notice duly published in the Providence *Journal*, in 1927, three years ago. Indeed, the date of Dr. Charriere's death was the only date that Gamwell could give me; all else was shrouded in vagueness. The house had not been rented more than once; there had been a brief occupation by a professional man and his family, but they had left it after a month, complaining of its dampness and the smells of the old place; since then it had stood empty, but it could not be torn down, for Dr. Charriere had left in his will a considerable sum of money to

keep the property off the tax-delinquent list for a long enough time—some said twenty years—to guarantee that the house would be standing there if and when heirs of the surgeon appeared to lay claim to it, the doctor having written vaguely of a nephew in French Indo-China, on military service. All attempts to find the nephew had proved futile, and now the house was being permitted to stand until the period specified in the will of Dr. Charriere had expired.

"I think of leasing it," I told Gamwell.

Ill though he was, my fellow antiquarian raised himself up on one elbow in protest. "A passing whim, Atwood—let it pass. I have heard disquieting things of the house."

"What things?" I asked him bluntly.

But of these things he would not speak; he only shook his head feebly and closed his eyes.

"I hope to examine it tomorrow," I went on.

"It offers nothing you could not find in Quebec, believe me," said Gamwell.

BUT, as I have set forth, his curious opposition served only to augment my desire to examine the house at close range. I did not mean to spend a life time there, but only to lease it for a half year or so, and make it a base of operations, while I went about the countryside around the city as well as the lanes and byways of Providence in search of the antiquities of that region. Gamwell did surrender at last the name of the firm of lawyers in whose hands the Charriere will had been placed, and when I made application to them, and overcame their own lack of enthusiasm, I became master of the old Charriere house for a period of not more than six months, and less, if I so chose.

I took possession of the house at once, though I was somewhat nonplussed to discover that, while running water had been put in, electricity had not. I found among the furnishings of the house—these had been left in each room, exactly as at the death of Dr. Charriere—a half dozen lamps of various shapes and ages, some of them apparently dating back a century or more, with which to light my way. I had expected to find the house cobwebbed and dusty, but I was surprised to learn that this was not the case, though I had not understood that the lawyers—the firm of Baker & Greenbaugh—had undertaken to care for the house during the half century it was to stand, short of someone's appearing to lay claim to it as the sole survivor of Dr. Charriere and his line.

The house was all I had hoped for. It was heavily timbered, and in some of the rooms paper had begun to peel from the plaster, while in others the plaster itself had never been covered, and shone yellow with age on the wall.

Its rooms were irregular—appearing to be either quite large or very small. It was of two stories, but the upper floor had not been much used. The lower or ground floor, however, abounded in evidence of its one-time occupant, the surgeon, for one room of it had manifestly served him as a laboratory of some kind, and an adjoining room as a study, for both had the look of having been but recently abandoned in the midst of some inquiry or research, quite as if the occupation of the house by its brief tenant—*post-mortem* Charriere—had not touched upon these rooms. And perhaps it had not, for the house was large enough to permit of habitation without disturbing them, both laboratory and study being at the back of the building, opening out upon a garden, now much overgrown with shrubs and trees, a garden of some size, since the house occupied a frontage of over three lots in width, and in depth reached to a high stone wall which was but a lot removed from the street in its rear

DR. CHARRIERE had evidently been in the midst of some work when his hour had struck, and I confess its nature intrigued me at once, for it was plainly no ordinary one. The inquiry was not alone a study of man, for there were strange, almost cabalistic drawings, resembling physiological charts, of various kinds of saurians, though the most prominent among them were of the order *Loricata* and the genera *Crocodylus* and *Osteolaemus*, though there were also recognizable drawings of *Gavialis*, *Tomistoma*, *Gaiman*, and *Alligator*, with a lesser number being speculative sketches of earlier members of this reptilian order reaching back to the Jurassic period. Yet even this fascinating glimpse of the surgeon's odd vein of inquiry would not have stimulated any really genuine delving into his affairs had it not been for the antiquarian mystery of the house.

The Charriere house impressed me at once as having been the product of its age, save for the later introduction of waterworks. I had all along assumed that Dr. Charriere himself had built it; Gamwell had nowhere in our somewhat elliptical conversation given me to understand otherwise; nor had he, for that matter, mentioned the surgeon's age at his death. Presuming it to be a well-rounded eighty years, then

it was certainly not he who had built the house, for internal evidence spoke clearly of its origin in the vicinity of the year 1700—or over two centuries before Dr. Charriere's death. It seemed to me, therefore, that the house only bore the name of its most recent long-time tenant, and not that of its builder; it was the pursuit of this problem which brought me to several disturbing phenomena which bore no relationship, seemingly, to credible facts.

For one thing, the year of Dr. Charriere's birth was nowhere in evidence. I sought out his grave—it was, strangely, on his own property; he had obtained permission to be buried in his garden, not far from a gracious old well which stood, roofed over, with bucket and all still as it had stood, doubtless, for almost as long as the house had been standing—with a view to examining his headstone for the date of his birth. To my disappointment and chagrin, his stone bore only his name—Jean-Francois Charriere—his calling: Surgeon—his places of residence or professional occupation—Bayonne: Paris: Pondicherry: Quebec: Providence—and the year of his death 1927. No more. This was enough only to further me on my quest, and forthwith I started to make inquiry by letter of acquaintances in various places where investigation might be made.

WITHIN a fortnight, the results of my inquiries were at hand. But, far from being in any way satisfied, I was more perplexed than ever. I had made my first enquiry of a correspondent in Bayonne, presuming that, since this was first mentioned on the stone, Charriere might have been born in that vicinity. I had next inquired in Paris, then of a friend in London, who might have access to information in British archives pertaining to India, and then in Quebec. What did I glean from all this correspondence but a riddling sequence of dates? A Jean-Francois Charriere had indeed been born in Bayonne—but in the year *1636!* The name was not unknown in Paris, either, for a seventeen-year old lad of that name had studied under the Royalist exile, Richard Wiseman, in 1653 and for three years thereafter. At Pondicherry—and later, too, on the Caronmandall Coast of India—one Dr. Jean-Francois Charriere, surgeon in the French army, had been on duty from 1674 onward. And in Quebec, the earliest record of Dr. Charriere was in 1691; he had practiced in that city for six years, and had then left the city for an unknown destination.

I was left, patently, with but

one conclusion: that the said Dr. Jean-Francois Charriere, born in Bayonne, 1636, last known to have been in Quebec the very year of the erection of the Charriere house on Benefit Street, was a forebear of the same name as the late surgeon who had last occupied the house.

BUT if so, there was an absolute lacuna between that time in 1697 and the lifetime of the last occupant of the house, for there was nowhere any account of the family of that earlier Jean-Francois Charriere; if there had been a Madame Charriere, if there had been children—as assuredly there must have been for the line to continue to the present century—there was no record of them. It was not impossible that the elderly gentleman who had come down from Quebec might have been of single status upon his arrival in Providence, and might have married thereafter. He would then have been sixty-one years of age. Yet a search of the appropriate registry failed to reveal any record of such a marriage, and I was left more bewildered than ever, though, as an antiquarian, I was fully aware of the difficulties of discovering facts and I was not at that time too discouraged to continue my inquiries.

I took a new line, and approached the firm of Baker & Greenbaugh for information about the late Dr. Charriere. Here an even more curious rebuff awaited me, for when I inquired about the appearance of the French surgeon, both the lawyers were forced to admit that they had never laid eyes on him. All their instructions had come by letter, together with checks of generous figures; they had acted for Dr. Charriere approximately six years before his death, and thereafter; before that time, they had not been retained by Dr. Charriere.

I inquired then about his "nephew," since the existence of a nephew implied, at least, that there had at one time been a sister to the late Dr. Charriere. But here, too, I was rebuffed; Gamwell had misinformed me, for Charriere had not specifically identified him as a nephew, but only as "the sole male survivor of my line"; this survivor had only been presumed to have been a nephew, and all search for him had come to naught, though there was that in Dr. Charriere's will which implied that the said "sole male survivor" would not need to be sought, but would make application to the firm of Baker & Greenbaugh either in person or by letter in such terms as to be unmistakable. Mystery there was, certainly; the lawyers did not deny it, but it was un-

derstood, also, that they had been well rewarded for their trust, too well to permit of any betrayal of it save in such casual terms as they had related to me. After all, as one of the lawyers sensibly pointed out, only three years had elapsed since the death of Dr. Charriere, and there was still ample time for the survivor to present himself.

Failing in this line of inquiry, I again called on my old friend, Gamwell, who was still abed, and now noticeably weaker. His attending physician, whom I encountered on the way out, now for the first time intimated that old Gamwell might not rise again, and cautioned me not to excite him, or to tire him with too many questions. Nevertheless, I was determined to ferret out what I could about Charriere, though I was not entirely prepared for the keen scrutiny to which I was subjected by Gamwell, quite as if he had expected that less than three weeks' residence in the Charriere house should have altered my very appearance.

AFTER the amenities had been exchanged, I turned to the subject about which I had come; explaining that I had found the house so interesting, I desired to know more of its late tenant. Gamwell had mentioned seeing him.

"But that was years ago," said Gamwell. "He's been dead three years. Let me see—1907, I think."

I was astounded. "But that was twenty years before he died!" I protested.

Nevertheless, Gamwell insisted, that was the year.

And how had he looked? I pressed the question upon him.

Disappointingly, senility and illness had encroached upon the old man's once fine mind.

"Take a newt, grow him a little, teach him to walk on his hind legs, and dress him in elegant clothes," Gamwell said. "I give you Dr. Jean-Francois Charriere. Except that his skin was rough, almost horny. A cold man. He lived in another world."

"How old was he?" I asked then. "Eighty?"

"Eighty?" He was contemplative. "When first I saw him—I was but twenty, then—he looked no older. And twenty years ago—my good Atwood—he had not changed a jot. He seemed eighty the first time. Was it the perspective of my youth? Perhaps. He seemed eighty in 1907. And died twenty years later."

"A hundred, then."

"It might well have been."

But Gamwell, too, was dissatisfying. Once again there was nothing definite, nothing con-

crete, no single fact—only an impression, a memory, of someone, I felt, Gamwell had disliked for no reason he could name. Perhaps some professional jealousy he did not care to name biased his judgment.

I NEXT sought the neighbors, but I found them for the most part younger people who had little memory of Dr. Charriere, except as someone whom they wished elsewhere, for he had an abominable traffic in lizards and the like, and none knew what diabolic experiments he performed in his laboratory. Only one among them was of advanced age; this was an old woman, a Mrs. Hepzibah Cobbett, who lived in a little two-story house directly behind the Charriere garden wall, and I found her much enfeebled, in a wheel chair, guarded over by her daughter, a hawk-nosed woman whose cold blue eyes looked at me askance from behind her pince-nez. Yet the old woman spoke, starting to life at mention of Dr. Charriere's name, realizing that I lived in the house.

"Ye'll not live there long, mark my words. It's a devil's house," she said with some spirit that degenerated rapidly into a senile cackling. "Many's the time I've laid eyes on him. A tall man, bent like a sickle, with a wee tuft of beard like a goat's whisker on his chin. And what was it that crawled about at his feet I could not see? A long, black thing, too big for a snake—though 'twas snakes I thought of every time I set eyes on Dr. Charriere. And what was it screamed that night? And what barked at the well—a fox, indeed, I know a fox and a dog, too. Like the yawping of a seal. I've seen things, I tell ye, but nobody'll believe a poor old woman with one foot in her grave. And ye—ye won't either, for none does."

What was I to make of this? Perhaps the daughter was right when she said, as she showed me out, "You must overlook mother's ramblings. She has an arterio-sclerotic condition which occasionally makes her sound quite weak-minded." But I did not think old Mrs. Cobbett weak-minded, for her eyes snapped and sparkled when she talked, quite as if she were enjoying a secret joke of proportions so vast that its very outlines escaped her keeper, the grim daughter who hovered ever near.

Disappointment seemed to await me at every turn. All avenues of information yielded little more together than any one had yielded. Newspaper files, library, records—all that was to be found was the date of the erection of the house: 1697, and the

date of the death of Dr. Jean-Francois Charriere. If any other Charriere had died in the city's history, there was no mention of him. It was inconceivable that death had stricken all the other members of the Charriere family, predeceasing the late tenant of the house on Benefit Street, away from Providence, and yet it must have been so, for there was no other feasible explanation.

Yet there was one additional fact—a likeness of Dr. Charriere which I discovered in the house; though no name was appended to it where it hung in a remote and almost inaccessible corner of an upstairs room, the initials J. F. C. identified it beyond reasonable doubt. It was the likeness of a thin-faced ascetic, wearing a straggly goatee; his face was distinguished by high cheekbones, sunken cheeks, and dark, blazing eyes. His aspect was gaunt and sepulchral.

THUS, in the absence of other avenues of information, I was driven once again to the papers and books left in Dr. Charriere's study and laboratory. Hitherto, I had been much away from the house, in the pursuit of my inquiry into Dr. Charriere's background; but now I was as much confined to the house as I had previously been away from it. Perhaps it was because of this confinement that I began to grow more keenly aware of the aura of the house—both in a psychic and a physical sense. That unhappy professional man and his family who had remained here but a month and then left because of the smells abounding had perhaps conditioned me to *smell* the house, and now, for the first time, I did indeed become sharply cognizant of various aromas and musks, some of them typical of old houses, but others completely alien to me. The dominant one, however, was identifiable; it was a musk I had encountered several times before—in zoos, swamps, along stagnant pools—almost a miasma which suggested most strongly the presence of reptiles. It was not impossible that reptiles had found their way through the city to the haven of the garden behind the Charriere house, but it was incredible that they should have persisted in such numbers as to taint the very air of the place. Yet, seek as I might, I could find no source of this reptilian musk, inside or out, though I fancied once that it emanated from the well, which was doubtless a result of an illusory conviction.

This musk persisted, and it was especially strong whenever rain fell, or a fog formed, or dew lay on the grass, as might have been expected, moisture

heightening all odors. The house was moist, too; its short-lived tenantry had been explained in part by this, and in this, certainly, the renter had not been in error. I found it often unpleasant, but not disturbing—not half so disturbing as other aspects of the house.

Indeed, it was as if my invasion of the study and laboratory had stirred the old house to protest, for certain hallucinations began to occur with annoying regularity. There was, for one, the curious barking sound which seemed to emanate from the garden late at night. And, for another, the illusion that an oddly bent, reptilian figure haunted the darkness of the garden outside the study windows. These and other illusions persisted—and I, in turn, persisted in looking upon them as hallucinatory—until that fateful night when, after hearing a distinct sound as of someone bathing in the garden, I woke from my sleep convinced that I was not alone in the house, and, putting on my dressing-robe and slippers, I lit a lamp and hurried to the study.

WHAT I saw there must certainly have been inspired by the nature of my inquiry into the late Dr. Charriere's papers; that it was a figment of a nightmare, I could not doubt at the moment, though I caught but a faint glimpse of the invader; for there was an invader in the study, and he made off with certain papers belonging to the Charriere estate. But as I saw him in the brief glimpse I had of him in the wan yellow light of the lamp held overhead and partially blinding me he seemed to glisten, he shone blackly, and he seemed to be wearing a skin-tight suit of some rough, black material. I saw him for only an instant, before he leapt through the open window into the darkness of the garden; I would have followed then, had it not been for the disquieting things I saw in the light of the lamp.

Where the invader had stood there were the irregular marks of feet—of wet feet—and more, of feet which were oddly broad, the toes of which were so long-nailed as to leave the marks of those nails before each toe; and where he had bent above the papers there was the same wetness; and over all there hung the powerful reptilian musk I had begun to accept as an integral part of the house, so powerful, indeed, that I almost reeled and fainted.

But my interest in the disturbed papers transcended fear or curiosity. At that time, the only rational explanation which occurred to me was that one of the neighbors, who had some animus against the Charriere house

and were constantly agitating to have it torn down, must have come from swimming to invade the study. Far-fetched, yes, certainly. But could any other explanation readily account for what I saw? I am inclined to think not.

As for the papers, certain of them were undeniably gone. Fortunately, these were the very ones I had finished with; I had put them into a neat pile, though many were not consecutive. I could not imagine why anyone would have wanted to take them, unless someone other than myself were interested in Dr. Charriere, perhaps with a view to laying claim to the house and property; for these papers were painstaking notes about the longevity of crocodiles and alligators, as well as of related reptiles. It had already begun to be plainly evident to me that the late doctor had been studying reptilian longevity with almost obsessive devotion, and with a view, clearly, to learning how man might lengthen his own life. If the secrets of reptilian longevity had been revealed to Dr. Charriere, there was nothing in his papers thus far to show that it had, though I had come upon two or three disquieting suggestions of "operations" performed—on whom was not set down—with a view to increasing the life span of the subject.

TRUE, there was one variant vein of notes in what I assumed to be Dr. Charriere's handwriting, treated as a related subject, but, to me, one at variance from the more or less scientific inquiry into the long life of reptiles. This was a sequence of cryptic references to certain mythological creatures, particularly one named "Cthulhu," and another named "Dagon," who were evidently deities of the sea in some ancient mythology completely unknown to me; and suggestions of long-lived creatures (or people?) who served these ancient Gods, named the "Deep Ones," evidently amphibious creatures living in the depths of the seas.

Among these notes were photographs of a singularly hideous monolithic statue, of a distinctly saurian cast of feature, labeled "E. coast Hivaoa Is., Marquesas. Object of worship?" and of a totem pole of the Northwest Coast Indians of a disturbingly similar workmanship, also reptilian in aspect, this one being marked, "Kwakiutl Indian totem. Quatsino Sound. Sim. t. erected by Tlingit Inds." These curious notes existed as if to show that Dr. Charriere was not averse to examining rites of ancient sorceries and primitive religious beliefs in an effort to bring about some earnestly desired goal.

What that goal might be was soon evident enough. Dr. Charriere had not been interested in the study of longevity for its sake alone; no, he had also wished to prolong his own life. And there were certain upsetting hints in the writings he had left behind him to suggest that in part, at least, he had succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. This was a disturbing discovery to make because it recalled again the curious history of that first Jean-Francois Charriere, also a surgeon, about whose later years and death there was fully as much mystery as there was about the birth and early years of the late Dr. Jean-Francois Charriere, who died in Providence in 1927.

The events of that night, though not frightening me too badly, did result in my purchasing a powerful Luger pistol in a second-hand shop, as well as a new flashlight; the lamp had impeded me in the night, which a flashlight would not do in similar circumstances. If indeed I had a visitor from among the neighbors, I could be sure that the papers he had taken would no more than whet his appetite, and sooner or later he would return. Against that contingency I meant to be fully prepared, and if again I caught a marauder in the study of the house I had leased, I would not hesitate to shoot if my demand to stop where he was were not heeded. I hoped, however, that I would not have occasion to use the weapon in such a manner.

ON THE next night I resumed my study of Dr. Charriere's books and papers. The books had surely at one time belonged to his forebears, for many of them dated back through the centuries; among them was a book translated into the French from the English of R. Wiseman, testifying to some connection between the Dr. Jean-Francois Charriere who had studied in Paris under Wiseman, and that other surgeon of similar name who had, until recently, lived in Providence, Rhode Island.

They were en masse a singular hodge-podge of books. They seemed to be in every known language, from French to Arabic. Indeed, I could not hope to translate a majority of the titles, though I could read French and had some smattering of the other Romance languages. I had at that time no understanding of the meaning of such a title as *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*, by Von Junzt, though I suspected that it was akin to the Count d'Erlette's *Cultes des Goules*, since it stood next to that book on the shelf. But then, books on zoological subjects stood beside weighty tomes about ancient

cultures; they bore such titles as *An Inquiry Into the Relationship of the Peoples of Polynesia and the Indian Cultures of the South American Continent, with Special Reference to Peru; The Pnakotic Manuscripts, De Furtivis Literarum Notis,* by Giambattista Porta; Thicknesse's *Kryptographik:* the *Daemonolatreia* of Remigius; Banfort's *The Saurian Age;* a file of the Aylesbury, Massachusetts, *Transcript;* another of the Arkham, Massachusetts, *Gazette*—and the like. Some of these books were certainly of immense value, for many of them dated as far back as from 1670 to 1820, and, though all showed much wear from use, all were still in relatively good condition.

These books, however, meant comparatively little to me. In retrospect, I am constrained to believe that, had I examined them more attentively, I might have learned even more than I did; but there is a saying that too much knowledge of matters men are better off without knowing is even more damning than too little. I soon gave over my examination of the books because I discovered, pressed in among them on the shelves, what seemed at first glance to be a diary or journal, but was, on closer examination, manifestly a notebook, for the entries dated too far back to have encompassed Dr. Charriere's span of years. All were written in a crabbed, tiny script, which was most certainly the late surgeon's, and, despite the age of the first pages, all had been written by the same hand, suggesting that Dr. Charriere had set down these notes in a kind of rough chronology, very probably from some earlier draft. Nor were they jottings alone; some were illustrated with crude drawings which were nevertheless effective, as are on many occasions the primitive paintings of untutored artists.

THUS, upon the very first page of the hand-bound manuscript, I came upon this entry: "1851. Arkham. Aseph Goade, D. O." and with it a drawing, presumably of the said Aseph Goade, emphasizing certain aspects of his features, which were batrachian in essence, for they were distinguished by an abnormally wide mouth, with peculiar leathery lips, a very low brow, strangely webbed eyes, and a generally squat physiognomy, giving them a distinctly and unmistakably froglike appearance. This drawing took up the majority of the page, and the jotting accompanying it I assumed to be a notation of an encounter—evidently in research, for it could hardly have been in the flesh—with a subhuman type—(could the "D.

O." have been a reference to the "Deep Ones," mention of which I had previously encountered?), which, doubtless, Dr. Charriere looked upon as a verification of the trend of his research, a trend to support a belief he probably held that some kinship with batrachia, and hence very probably also saurians, could be traced.

To that end, too, there were other jottings. Most of them were so vague—perhaps purposely so—as to seem to me at that first examination of them virtually meaningless. What was I to make of a page like this, for instance?

**"1857. St. Augustine. Henry Bishop. Skin very scaly, but not ichthyic. Said to be 107 years old. No deteriorative process. All senses still keen. Ancestry uncertain, but Polynesian trade in background.**

**"1861. Charleston. Balacz family. Crusted hands. Double jaw construction. Entire family manifesting similar stigmata. Anton 117 years old. Anna 109. Unhappy away from water.**

**"1863. Innsmouth. Marsh, Waite, Eliot, Gilman families. Captain Obed Marsh a trader in Polynesia, married to a Polynesian woman. All bearing facial characteristics similar to Aseph Goade's. Much secretive living. Women seldom seen in streets, but at night much swimming—entire families, all the rest of the town keeping to their houses, swimming out to Devil Reef. Relationship to D. O. very marked. Considerable traffic between Innsmouth and Ponape. Some dark religious worship.**

**"1871. Jed Price, carnival entertainer. Billed as 'Alligator Man.' Appears in pool of alligators. Saurian look. Long lantern jaw. Said to have pointed teeth, but whether real or filed unable to determine."**

This was the general tenor of the jottings in the book. Their range was continental—there were notes referring to Canada and Mexico as well as the eastern seaboard of North America. From them, Dr. Jean-Francois Charriere began to emerge as a man obsessed with a strange compulsion—to establish proof of the longevity of certain human beings seemingly bearing some kinship to saurian or batrachian ancestors.

ADMITTEDLY, the weight of the evidence gathered, could one have accepted it all as fact, rather than as wishfully colored accounts of people with some marked physical defect, seemed to lend to Dr. Charriere and his belief a strange and provocative corroboration. Yet the surgeon had not often gone beyond the realm of pure conjec-

ture. What he sought seemed to be the connecting link among the various instances which had come to his notice. He had sought this link in three bodies of lore. The most familiar of these was the *vodu* legendry of Negro culture. Next to it, in familiarity, stood the animal worship of ancient Egypt. Finally, and most important, according to the surgeon's notes, was a completely alien culture which was as old as earth, nay, older, involving ancient Elder Gods and their terrible, unceasing conflict with equally primeval Old Ones who bore such names as Cthulhu, Hastur, Yog-Sothoth, Shub-Niggurath, and Nyarlathotep, and who were served in turn by such curious beings as the Tcho-Tcho People, the Deep Ones, the Shantaks, the Abominable Snow Men, and others, some of whom appeared to have been a sub-order of human being, but others of which were either definite mutations or not human at all. All this fruit of Dr. Charriere's research was fascinating, but in no case had he adduced a definite, provable link. There were certain saurian references in the *Vodu* cult; there were similar connections to the religious culture of ancient Egypt; and there were many obscure and tantalizing suggestions connecting the saurians to the Cthulhu myth-pattern, ranging far deeper into the past than *Crocodylus* and *Gavialis*, embracing *Tyrannosaurus* and *Brontosaurus*, *Megalosaurus* and other Mesozoic reptilia.

In addition to these interesting notes, there were diagrams of what seemed to be very odd operations, the nature of which I did not fully comprehend at that time. These were apparently copied out of ancient texts, particularly one given frequently as source entitled, *De Vermis Mysteriis*, by Ludvig Prinn, another of those obscure references completely foreign to me. The operations themselves suggested a *raison d'etre* too astounding to accept on face; one of them, for instance, was designed to stretching the skin, consisting of many incisions made to "permit growth." Yet another was a simple cross-incision made at the base of the spine for the purpose of "extension of the tailbone." What these fantastic diagrams suggested was too horrible to contemplate, yet it was part and parcel, surely, of the strange research conducted for so many years by Dr. Charriere, whose seclusion was thus readily explicable, since his was a project which could only be conducted in secret lest it bring down upon him the scorn and laughter of his fellow scientists.

Among these papers there were, also certain references

set down in such a manner that I could not doubt they were the experiences of the narrator. Yet, for all that these antedated 1850, in some cases by decades, they were unmistakably in Dr. Charriere's handwriting, so that —excepting always the possibility that he had transcribed the experiences of someone else—it was evident that he was more than an octogenarian at the time of his death, indeed, far more, so much more that the very anticipation of it made me uneasy, and cast my thoughts back to that other Dr. Charriere who had gone before him.

The sum total of Dr. Charriere's credo amounted to a strongly hypothetical conviction that a human being could, by means of certain operations, together with other unusual practices of a macabre nature, take upon himself something of the longevity that characterized the sauria; that as much as a century and a half, perhaps even two centuries, could be added to a man's life span; and, beyond that, given a period of semi-conscious torpor in some moist place, which would amount to a kind of gestation, the individual could emerge again, somewhat altered in aspect, true, to begin another lengthy span of life, which would, by virtue of the physiological *changes* which had taken place in him, be of necessity somewhat altered from his previous mode of existence. To support this conviction, Dr. Charriere had amassed only a number of legendary tales, certain data of a kindred nature, and highly speculative accounts of curious human mutations known to have existed in the past two hundred and ninety-one years—a figure which later assumed far more meaning, when I realized that this was the exact span of time from the year of the birth of that earlier Dr. Charriere to the date of the later surgeon's death. Nowhere in all this material was there anything resembling a concrete line of scientific research, with adducible proof—only hints, vague intimations, hideous suggestions—sufficient, in truth, to fill a casual reader with horrible doubts and terrible, half-formed convictions, but not nearly enough to warrant the sober interest of any genuine scholar.

HOW much farther I would have gone into Dr. Charriere's research, I do not know.

Had it not been for the occurrence of *that* which sent me screaming in horror from that house on Benefit Street, it was possible that I would have gone much farther instead of leaving house and contents to be claimed by a survivor who, I know now, will never come, thus leaving the

house to fall to its ultimate destruction by the city.

It was while I was contemplating these "findings" of Dr. Charriere that I became aware of being under scrutiny, that manifestation people are fond of calling the "sixth sense." Unwilling to turn, I did the next best thing; I opened my pocket-watch, set it up before me, and used the inside of the highly polished case as a kind of mirror to reflect the windows behind me. And there I saw, dimly reflected, a horrible travesty of a human face, which so startled me that I turned to view for myself that which I had seen mirrored. But there was nothing at the pane, save the shadow of movement. I rose, put out the light, and hastened to the window. Did I then see a tall, curiously bent figure, crouched and shuffling in an awkward gait into the darkness of the garden? I believed that I did, but I was not given to folly enough to venture out in pursuit. Whoever it was would come again, even as he had come the previous night.

Accordingly, I settled back to watch, a score of possible explanations crowding upon my mind. As the source of my nocturnal visitor, I confess I put at the head of the list the neighbors who had long opposed the continued standing of the house of Dr. Charriere. It was possible that they meant to frighten me away, unaware of the shortness of my lease; it was also possible that there was something in the study they wanted, though this was far-fetched, in view of the time they had had to search the house during its long period of unoccupancy. Certainly the truth of the matter never once occurred to me; I am not by nature any more skeptical than an antiquarian might be expected to be; but the true identity of my visitor did not, I confess, suggest itself to me despite all the curious interlocking circumstances which might have conveyed a greater meaning to a lesser scientific mind than my own.

As I sat there in the dark, I was more than ever impressed with the curious aura of the old house. The very darkness seemed alive, incredibly remote from the life of Providence which swirled all around it. The interior darkness was filled instead with the psychic residue of years —the persistent smell of moisture, accompanied by that musk so commonly associated with reptilian quarters at the zoo; the smell of old wood, old limestone, of which the cellar walls were composed, the odor of decay, for the centuries had begun to deteriorate both wood and stone. And there was something more—the vaporous hint of an

animal presence, which seemed indeed to grow stronger with every passing moment.

I SAT there well over an hour, before I heard any untoward sound.

Then it was indistinguishable. At first I thought it a bark, akin to that sound made by alligators; but then I thought it rather less a figment of my perfervid imagination than the actual sound of a door closing. Yet it was some time before another sound smote upon my ears—a rustling of papers. Astonishing as it was, an intruder had actually found his way into the study before my very eyes without being seen! I turned on the flashlight, which was directed at the desk.

What I saw was incredible, horrible. It was not a man who stood there, but a travesty of a man. I know that for one cataclysmic moment I thought consciousness would leave me; but a sense of urgency coupled with an awareness of acute danger swept over me, and without a moment's hesitation, I fired four times, at such range that I knew each shot had found harbor in the body of the bestial thing that leaned over Dr. Charriere's desk in that darkened study.

Of what followed I have, mercifully, only the vaguest memory. A wild thrashing about—the escape of the invader—my own uncertain pursuit. I had struck him, certainly, for a trail of blood led from the study to the windows through which he had gone, tearing away glass and frame in one. Outside, the light of my flash gleamed on the drops of blood, so that I had no difficulty following them. Even without this to follow, the strong musk pervading the night air would have enabled me to trace whoever had gone ahead.

I was led—not away from the house—but deeper into the garden, straight to the curb of the well behind the house. And over the curb *into the well,* where I saw for the first time in the glow of the flashlight the cunningly fashioned steps which led down into that dark maw. So great was the discharge of blood at the well curb, that I was confident I had mortally wounded the intruder. It was that confidence which impelled me to follow, despite the manifest danger.

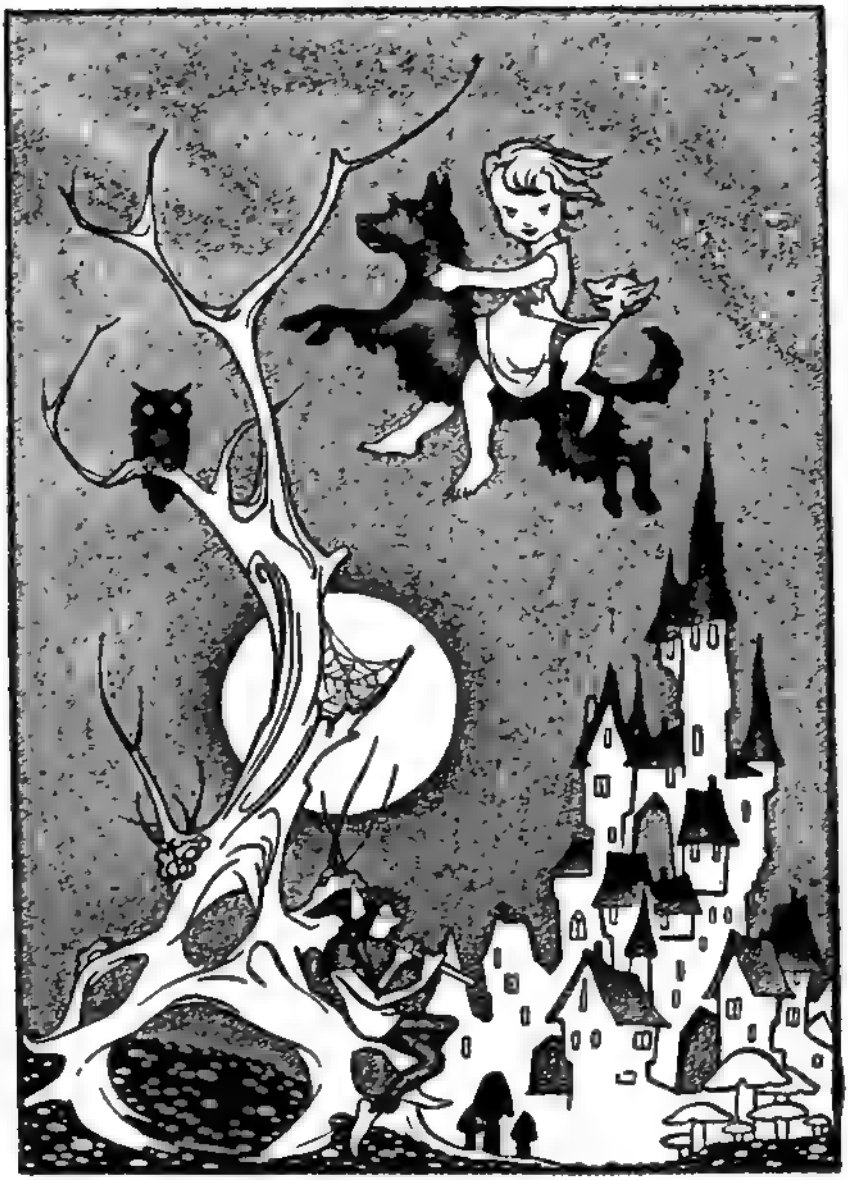
Would that I had turned at the well-curb and gone away from that accursed place! For I followed down the rungs of the ladder set into the well-wall—not to the water below, as I had at first thought I might be led—but to an aperture opening into a tunnel in the well wall, leading even deeper into the garden. Compelled now by a burning desire to know the nature of my victim, I pushed into

this tunnel, unmindful of the damp earth which stained my clothes, with my light thrust before me, and my weapon in instant readiness. Up ahead I could see a kind of hollowed out cavern—not any larger than enough to permit a man to kneel upright—and in the center of my flashlight's glow stood a casket, at sight of which I hesitated momentarily, for I recognized the direction of the tunnel away from the well led toward the grave of Dr. Charriere. But I had come too far to retreat.

The smell in this narrow opening was almost indescribable. Pervading every part of the tunnel was the nauseatingly strong musk of reptiles; indeed, it lay so thickly in the air that I had to force myself to press on toward the casket. I came up to it and saw that it lay uncovered. The trail of blood led to the edge of the casket and into it. Impelled by burning curiosity and a half-formed fear of what I might find, I rose to my knees and forced the light tremblingly into the casket. . . .

IT MAY well be charged that after so many years my memory is no longer to be relied upon. But what I saw there was imprinted indelibly on my memory. For there, in the glow of my light, lay a newly-dead being, the implications of whose existence overwhelmed me with horror. This was the thing I had killed. Half-man, half-saurian, it was a ghastly travesty upon what had once been a human being. Its clothes were split and torn by the horrible mutations of the flesh, by the crusted skin which had burst its bonds, its hands and unshod feet were flat, powerful in appearance, claw-like. I gazed in speechless terror at the shuddersome tail-like appendage which pushed bluntly out from the base of the spine, at the terrible elongated, crocodilian jaw, to which still grew a tuft of hair, like a goat's beard.

All this I saw before a merciful unconsciousness overcame me,—*for I had seen enough to recognize what lay in that coffin —him who had lain there in a cataleptic torpor since 1927, waiting his turn to come back in frightfully altered form to live again—Dr. Jean-Francois Charriere, surgeon, born in Bayonne in 1636, "died" in Providence in 1927—and I knew that the survivor of whom he had written in his will was none other than himself, born again, renewed by a hellish knowledge of long-forgotten, eldritch rites more ancient than mankind, as old as that early vernal earth on which great beasts fought and tore!*



Heading by Boris Dolgov

"Deep in the dewy shadows of a wood or where stars walk upon a mountaintop."

# More Than Shadow

***BY DOROTHY QUICK***

THE third time it happened she was aware of its strangeness.

Up till then it hadn't mattered or seemed important, but the third time made her realize that something unusual was taking place and that there was cause for alarm.

She had just finished lunch and thought the philodendrons on either side of the mantelpiece needed watering. So, because she had gotten into the habit of saving water during the shortage, she took her glass, which was as full as when the maid had filled it, and started towards the fireplace. Half-way there the glass, for no reason which she could account, slipped from her hand.

The water spilled on the delft blue rug and rapidly began to coagulate into a shape as the glass rolled off towards the fireplace.

She watched the wet shape on the rug. "It *is* a little dog," she half whispered.

Almost as though an artist had painted it, there on the rug was the outline of a dog, a tiny dog with puffy, curly hair and, due to the way the water had absorbed and the wet and dry patches, it had a most beguiling expression. It was so real that she had to restrain herself from bending over to pick it up.

It looked exactly like a little dog waiting to be lifted into its mistress's arms. It had dimension and a definite personality. It seemed more than a shadow or a wet spot.

Just then Mona remembered that this had happened before—twice.

The first time had been at the table—here in the dining room. Her youngest daughter, aged three, had upset her glass of milk, purposely Mona suspected, knowing her offspring didn't like the bounty of the cow. She was just about to utter a reprimand when the child, Carol, had cried out, "Look, Mummy, it's a little dog."

The milk had run across the table as fluids do and settled in front of Mona's place. The shape of the damp place on the linen tablecloth was definitely that of a little dog.

The same little dog at which she was looking now, Mona thought and shuddered.

That day at the table she had laughed. It had seemed funny. Because the spilled milk had settled in the form of a little dog Carol had escaped the scolding and Mona had mopped up the milk reluctantly because the little dog shape was so cunning.

But she forgot about it almost immediately.

THREE days later, a rainy Sunday afternoon it was, she was sitting in the living room with her husband, Hal; the three children, Carol, Meg and Harry, Jr. were playing nearby. Ellen, the maid, brought the tea. Mona gave the two older children a very weak version and Carol had milk in her cup. Then she handed Hal his stronger share. He started with it towards his favorite chair. The cup, which had seemed firm on its saucer, could not have been, for it bounced off, spilling the tea on the beige carpet.

For an instant there was silence. Then Carol came running over from the other side of the room. "Little dog, litle dog," she exclaimed, pointing to the wet spot.

Mona stared. It was true. There was the outline of a little dog, curly haired, with an uplifted paw.

Her husband laughed, "You're right, Carol. It *is* a little dog, and it's cute too. I'd like a little dog like that around the house."

Carol clapped her hands, "Daddy, get one for Carol."

"Maybe." Hal nodded, "if we could find an attractive one like that."

The other two children were there by then, exclaiming, saying they'd like a dog too.

Hal got another cup of tea and reached his favorite chair with it safely before he delivered the pronouncement, "You can't all have dogs. If you'll just settle for a community animal—"

By the time the argument was over the carpet had dried and Mona forgot the whole business as quickly as the children did. But now here was the dog again, and more real than ever.

Tiny, curly-haired, with a front paw elevated appealingly, a sharp, pointed nose, utterly beguiling. "It must be a poodle," Mona thought, "a very small poodle. But why does it keep happening? Is it an omen, does it mean we ought to have a dog?"

It was probably a trick of wind ruffling the rug, but it seemed as though the paw was further out-

thrust and the outline of the little creature quivered with eagerness.

Ellen came into the dining room. Mona called her, pointed to the spot. "What does that look like?" she asked.

The girl giggled, "Why, for all the world like a little dog, the kind the leprechauns keep. 'Tis said in Ireland the little people ride them on moonlight nights."

"Where do they go?" Mona was surprised at herself for putting the question.

"Now that we do not be asking." Ellen lapsed into the brogue she'd brought with her two years ago when she came over to visit her Aunt Mary who cooked for Mr. and Mrs. Hal Devitt. "But," she dropped her voice as though afraid of being overheard, "some say the little dogs take them over the mountain to the land of youth."

A quotation from Yeats leaped into Mona's mind.

*Where nobody gets old and godly and grave*
*Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise*
*Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue*
*And she is still there, busied with a dance,*
*Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood*
*Or where stars walk upon the mountainside.*

The words had always appealed to Mona, ever since she had played the girl in the play the graduating class had done at school, "The Land of Heart's Desire." The lines had stuck in her mind and now they were echoing over and over, "Deep in the dewy shadows of a wood, or where stars walk upon a mountaintop."

And the little dog could take you there—over the mountaintop to the land of heart's desire where—what was it the child in the play had said? "Could make you ride upon the winds, run on the top of the dishevelled tide, and dance upon the mountains like a flame." Her mind went back to the play. There had been more. She remembered the child's speech:

*You shall go with me, newly married bride*
*And gaze upon a merrier multitude.*

Then there had been Irish names, Nuala, Ardoe the wise, Feacra and Finvarra,

*And their land of Heart's Desire*
*Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,*
*But joy is wisdom. Time an endless song.*

The little dog could take you to that!

MONA caught herself up sharply. The coincidence of the dog's outline happening there times and Ellen's old-world leprechauns with their dogs to ride had woven a spell over her —that and Yeats' magic poetry. But she mustn't be a dreamer as she had been in the part of Maire which she had acted in the play—and never forgotten. She could remember now how when she had sunk to the floor, playing dead, the child having stolen her soul away. She had felt that it would have been worth it to find that land where people were forever young, never to grow old, "to dance upon the mountains like a flame." It would have been worth losing your soul, she had thought.

Then the curtain had fallen and the child was her schoolmate, Meg, again, and she was Mona, alive and hoping Hal had liked her performance.

He had; that very night he had proposed. "I shouldn't yet. I've got three more years of college, but, after seeing you so ethereal, so beautiful, and so far away, I had to be sure of you. Will you marry me, Mona, when I can support you?"

She would, and they had been married before he had taken his place in his father's law office. They had been very happy. Their life had been full. They loved each other, had three wonderful children, she had wanted nothing. Yet why did the outline, something more than a shadow, of a dog, make her remember and long for the Land of Heart's Desire? This was nonsense. She mustn't even think of it any more. She turned to Ellen. "Get a cloth," she commanded and was ashamed at the edgy tone in her voice, "and mop it up."

"Yes ma'm," said Ellen, and then in a sharp tone of surprise, "But it's all dry—the little dog has gone."

A WEEK after that the dog came. It was a poodle and Carol found it down by the garden gate. She and Meg came running to Mona, the little bunch of black fluff clasped tightly in Meg's arms.

Out of the chorus of exclamations and requests of "Can we keep him?" Mona gathered that the dog had been sitting by the gate, that it had greeted the children like a long-lost friend, that they already adored it. There was no sign of a collar or license tag. It hadn't been clipped, and it was adorable. The minute they put it down it capered up to Mona, turned several circles in front of her and then put up one paw, "Like the dog on the rug" Mona thought. She felt strange about the dog, but she had to admit it was captivating. When it jumped up in her arms and cud-

dled its head against her neck she was completely won over.

"Yes. You can keep it if no one claims it," she said, absurdly conscious of the appeal of the little creature. She was as desirous as the children to have the little dog, but common sense warned her not to let them count too much on having it. "But I'm sure that it has an owner. It's such a beautiful dog." She caressed the little head "that it must belong to someone. It's probably lost—run away maybe. They might advertise for it in the paper—"

"We don't have to read the papers," Meg suggested with practicality.

"That wouldn't be honest," Mona told them. "We will watch out. In the meantime you can play with him. Suppose you get him some milk, Harry."

Harry obliged. Mona reluctantly put the little dog down. It drank a little, then cavorted about, jumping up on the children, licking their hands. When it came to Carol it leaped into her lap and, putting its paws on her shoulders, seemed to be whispering into her ear.

"Did you ever see anything so cute?" Meg asked.

MONA was conscious of a twinge of jealousy. She had loved the feeling of the tiny head nestling close to her face. She shoved her feeling into the back of her consciousness and agreed that the little dog was cute.

So did Hal and Ellen. They all hoped that no one would claim the tiny poodle. It was so gay, such good company. It seemed to know just what their mood was and fit into it.

"I've always heard poodles were smart," Hal said after it had been with them two days, "but I swear this one is almost human."

With that the little dog climbed up his leg and licked the man's big hand as though it were saying 'thank you.' "See what I mean?" boomed Hal, patting the small head. "I certainly hope no one comes for it."

No one did.

After a week they felt safe, and as though "Jet," so called for his beady, black eyes and "because he was jettisoned" Hal added, and then had to explain to the children what the word meant.

They all, except Ellen, adored the poodle. Ellen kept insisting there was something strange about him. The poodle seemed to like them all equally well. To Mona there was something specially appealing about the little dog. She actually reached the point where she tried to get him off to herself, carrying him into her room to be with her while she napped—but, whether by design or not, he always barked

or made some noise that brought the children running.

Baby Carol would put up her three-year-old hands to the bed. "Yet" she would call, "Yet," her tongue not able to master the intricacies of the letter J.

Then Mona would have to lift the little thing down, and off he would go with the children scampering with all the abandon of youth—so oddly at variance with the wise look in his shoe-button eyes.

"It's that that makes me love him so," Mona thought, "that queer mixture of youth and wisdom. It's amazing what a difference a dog makes in a house."

And it really was. The children never needed to be amused now. They had Jet. If they got restless he brought his ball, dropped it in Meg or Harry's lap for them to throw. He retrieved without being taught. Even Hal was forced into the game and Mona—no matter how busy the children were there was always some time during the day when the dog cuddled up into her neck as he had done the first day he came.

Mona found herself looking forward to it almost as a ritual. "It's ridiculous" she scolded herself, "but when he's there I seem to have visions of a never-never land, Yeats' Land of Heart's Desire. I suppose because I thought of the play with all that nonsense of Ellen's when he first came and its association of ideas. But it's uncanny, really."

Finally she told Hal about it. "I think I'm going mad. I keep wishing he'd grow life-size and I could ride away on his back. I see visions in which I—sober, sedate Mona—dance upon the mountains like a flame. Do you think I'm crazy?"

HAL looked at his pretty wife. "You're anything but sedate, Mona. You know you're lovely and you're not nuts either. There's something about that animal—you know, when he licks my hand it feels like water touching my skin. I think of the rushing waters of a bright brook with motes dancing in the sunlight, and I feel like chucking business and going fishing. Pretty silly the end of April."

"Well, you could go to Florida." Mona said seriously.

"Now don't you go encouraging me. I don't have a vacation till August! I just wanted to explain the dog's effect on me." He patted Mona's shoulder. "You see, dear, it's because the little dog is so young, so blithe and gay he releases our inhibitions. It's good for us."

Mona wasn't convinced. "The children are young, blithe and gay. They don't make me want to 'dance on the mountain like a flame.' "

Hal threw back his head and laughed. "That would be pretty difficult to do. Have you ever seen a flame dance on a mountain? These poetic imageries are all right until you break them down. Then what have you—nothing, nothing at all."

He was right of course. A flame could dance in a fireplace but on a mountain it would be, as Hal said, nothing, or a forest fire. She joined in her husband's laughter and forgot the whole business when he suggested they might go out dancing.

They hadn't done that for a long time. It would be fun indeed. "I'll go nap," she told him, "so I'll look my best."

"You always do." He kissed her as he had when they were engaged. Mona forgot everything but the moment.

The poodle was on her bed waiting for her—wagging its pom-pom tail in an utter abandon of ecstasy, cavorting up and down regardless of her blue satin bedspread. Mona wondered idly how he'd gotten up on the high bed. He was such a little thing. "Jet," she said in the manner proverbial to all dog lovers, "Good Jet" and patted the tiny head.

As she took off her dress the poodle watched her gravely. He was like a little old woman sitting on the end of the bed—or a gnome. She slipped into a wrapper, a filmy thing of lace and nylon and curled up on the bed. In two seconds flat he was beside her, nestled into the curve of her shoulder, his head close to her cheek.

For once the children didn't come and she lay there strangely content, her fingers caressing the soft wool of Jet's pompadour.

PRESENTLY she began to hear a weird music, soft and slow, unlike any she had ever heard before, a line from a song came to her—"Strange Music of the Spheres." Someone must be playing a radio, she thought, and yet no radio had ever produced music like this, yet in some odd way it seemed mixed up with the poodle's rhythmic breathing and the Yeats' play came back into her mind. *The Land of Heart's Desire, where nobody gets old.*

Then she must have fallen asleep for the poodle began to talk. "I can take you there—where everything is wondrous strange and beautiful, where running water makes music all day long, where there is no age, no pain, nothing but happiness. Will you come with me? Ride upon my back to eternal joy?"

And then incredibly the poodle was beside the bed, the size of a pony, small but big enough to carry her.

Mona knew instinctively that

if she got on his back she would achieve the Land of Heart's Desire. Out of the large body the same poodle eyes looked into hers. In them was eternal youth and an age-old wisdom. But there was something else—something that filled her with horror—a cold, calculating look that was evil. She shivered and pulled her robe close.

In her ears the music swelled and the poodle's voice mingled with it. "Come, come with me to eternal joy. Just get on my back."

The music was louder. Suddenly she forgot the evil, forgot everything but the promise of eternal joy. She swung around on the bed, her legs dangling over the side. Then she was on her feet and the poodle threw back its coal black head and made a sound that was half human, half animal, but wholly triumphant, and it was the same evil she saw in the shining eyes. For the first time she was aware of the dog's sharply pointed white teeth. She had noticed the incisors when the poodle had been small, thought they were over-large. Now they looked exactly like the fangs they were. She visioned them dripping with blood—her blood—and she stopped advancing, standing stock still. Her eyes met those of the dog's, those jet-like button eyes that had given him his name.

"No," she whispered, "no, I cannot come."

"Only one step." The voice came from the poodle's throat, mingling with the music. "Only one step and it is yours—eternal youth—with me." The poodle's eyes were veiled. It lifted one foot enticingly. "Come," it insisted, and moved nearer to her.

Again she began to move towards the dog who now seemed larger than ever. "You won't get out of the door with me on your back," she said.

"There will be no doors for us now, or ever again," the dog replied. It looked at her again.

THIS time she saw the evil in its eyes but she didn't care. The music had her in its spell. The poodle had charmed her, too. She no longer thought it evil or that it was strange it had enlarged itself. She knew that it would bear her through the door or the wall, if necessary, to another world—to eternal joy or eternal damnation. She didn't care which as long as the music lasted.

She took another step. The poodle cavorted like a prancing horse as it had done when it was a tiny dog showing off. "Hurry," its words rang in her ears. "Hurry, get on my back so we can ride."

She put her hand on its shin-

ing topknot, the black hair that was soft as cashmere.

The music enveloped her like a mantle of lovely vibrating sound.

She put her other hand on the poodle's back that was clean-shaven, smooth as broadtail and as high as her shoulder.

Just as she was about to swing herself into place the door opened and the children tumbled in, Baby Carol, Meg and Harry Junior.

"Mother," Meg said reproachfully, "you've got Jet in here."

She was back on her bed, the poodle lying curled against her neck, tiny as always, but looking at her with deep unfathomable eyes.

Even as she looked at it she saw and felt the deep sigh that wracked its fragile little body.

In her ears was a whisper, "Too late." The music was gone.

"Yet, Yet," Baby Carol was pushing herself against the bed.

"I was asleep," Mona told herself, "and I dreamed, but what a dream!"

Almost in a daze she reached up for the poodle, cradled the tiny body in her two hands. "Run along, little Jet," she said.

The poodle leaned towards her and licked her cheek.

For an instant she thought she heard the music again. But it was only wishful thinking. Except for the children the room was quiet.

"Yet, Yet," Baby Carol was calling.

Mona gave the poodle to Harry Junior.

"Run along, children," she admonished, "Mother has to dress."

THEY left her and she got off the bed. She felt enervated. "What a dream!" she said, half aloud. "I'm actually exhausted—over a dream—no, I guess it was more than a dream. It was in the nightmare class."

She shook the memory of it off, bathing her face with cold water to get rid of it. She dressed quickly. When she reached the living room and Hal she wore her new Dior taffeta suit with the bell-like flaring skirt and the jeweled cap that perched jauntily on her golden curls.

"Mona," her husband exclaimed, "you're ravishing." He kissed her.

"What a fool I was," she thought, "to want to leave him for eternal joy—even in a dream! Why, I've got eternal joy with him! And the children. It took a nightmare to make me realize it, though."

She sighed as the poodle had sighed.

"Come along," Hal said.

"Shouldn't we tell the children good-bye?" she asked.

"I sent them off to the garden to play—and I've told Ellen we're going out. Come on dear, tonight is entirely our own."

"I must tell you about the silliest dream I had," she began as they hailed a taxi.

"Later," he said. "Right now I want to talk about you and how lovely you are."

She never did tell him about the dream.

IT WAS late when they reached home. "It's been a perfect evening," Mona said as Hal put his key in the front door lock.

The door swung open before he turned the key. A white-faced Ellen stood inside peering out at them anxiously.

"Is anything wrong?" Mona asked, alarmed by the look on her maid's face.

Ellen kept staring. "Did you take the baby with you?" she asked. Her voice was unsteady.

"No," Hal replied tersely. "Why?"

Ellen's lips quivered. "I so hoped you'd taken her, even though I was sure you hadn't. She's gone. She wasn't there when I called the children for supper—neither she nor the little dog. I asked Meg and Harry where she was and they said the last time they'd seen her she was playing with Jet in the far corner of the garden."

"But surely—" Mona began over Hal's, 'We'd better phone the police.'

"Oh, no sir." Ellen wailed, "It's no use. It's May eve, the time when the "little people" have power. They've spirited her away. The little dog was their emissary. He came ahead to get someone from this house. I never liked the little dog. I think I knew from the first—"

"Nonsense," Hal broke in, "there was nothing wrong with the dog. There are no little people. I'll phone the police and ask the neighbors—"

"I did that," Ellen cut in. "Two of them saw Carol. They said she was laughing happily, riding on the back of a poodle dog as large as a pony."

Mona remembered what she had thought was a dream—a nightmare. When the poodle had grown big—big enough to take her to the Land of Heart's Desire. She remembered the cold, calculating look—the evil.

It had been actuality, not a dream. In one sickening moment she glimpsed another world, another dimension and knew it was more than shadow and that she would never see her child again.

Everything seemed normal—except that one man, and the kitten, had vanished.

# Never Stop to Pat a Kitten

***BY MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD***

HANRAHAN did. Then he disappeared. When Seaforth went back to find out what was keeping him, there was no Hanrahan. The street was light enough to show the fluffy black

**Heading by Boris Dolgov**

kitten, its eyes bright, its back still arched to rub against Hanrahan's leg. Its purr was still on the air.

But no Hanrahan.

Seaforth went to the corner, looked both ways. Nobody at all was in sight except a couple arm in arm, and an old gentleman with a cane. "He walked around the horses," Seaforth murmured; he was a science fiction writer. But Hanrahan hadn't. He had just stopped to pat a kitten.

To Hanrahan, it was the kitten and Seaforth who had disappeared. He looked everywhere for them, but they just weren't there any more. The street was otherwise exactly the same, except that it was deserted.

Hanrahan was one to accept strangeness. He walked on, thinking of possible improbabilities, learned from Seaforth. Of teleportation—but he was not somewhere else, he was here in his own city. Of another space-time continuum—but at a corner was a stand full of tomorrow morning's papers, and he remembered the headlines he had read an hour before. Of death—but in his abstraction he walked into a traffic signal, and it was hard and hurt his knee. Of insanity, which was the most disturbing—but everything seemed perfectly clear and normal to his mind, except that Seaforth and the kitten had vanished.

He had mentally painted himself into a corner; he decided to give up and go home. He and Seaforth had only been taking a late walk, because it was hot in the apartment and they wanted some fresh air and exercise after a lazy Sunday. Probably when he got home he would find Seaforth and there would be some simple explanation. Even the kitten might be there—it had seemed to have no owner and to be interested in being adopted.

Only, why were the streets so curiously empty, even for late on a Sunday night? He saw not one living creature in the mile or so back to the apartment, and not a single car passed him or could be heard on nearby streets.

He let himself into the apartment house, and his key worked. The downstairs hall was lighted but vacant. That was natural, at such an hour; there was no desk or lobby. The automatic elevator worked too, and so did the key to his apartment.

Seaforth wasn't there. Neither, needless to say, was the kitten. Hanrahan went out to the kitchen, switched on the light, and got himself a can of beer out of the refrigerator. He took it back to the living room, and sat down to think things over. He could make no sense out of what had happened.

He picked up the book he had been reading when Seaforth sug-

gested a walk, and opened it a few pages past the place he had marked. Bronowski, "The Common Sense of Science." "There is not a fact and an observer," he read, "but a joining of the two in an observation." And then: "Event and observer are not separable."

But he, as observer, was now apparently separable from all events.

HE SAT brooding until almost dawn, but he did not see or hear anything of Seaforth. At last, worn out, he undressed and went to bed. A moment later he was deep in sleep.

Hanrahan woke to a silent world. The only sound he could hear was the one he himself made by sitting up in bed. Instantly he remembered the night before. He put on slippers and a dressing-gown, and knocked on Seaforth's door. There was no answer. He turned the knob. The room was empty.

In the mirror over the chest of drawers he saw his worried face.

"Steady, you fool," he scolded himself. He glanced at the clock; it was ten minutes past ten. He grinned in relief. Monday mornings at ten Seaforth had a class in creative writing at State.

He wandered into the kitchen. Seaforth had been there, sure enough; the dishes from his breakfast were in the sink, and the pot was half full of cold coffee. Mrs. Beck would be in at eleven, to clean up; he'd better get himself shaved and dressed and have his own breakfast before she arrived. At 50, and with her face, she was still jittery about working in a bachelor apartment; it would never do to let her find him in his pajamas.

"Lord, what a nightmare that was!" he thought as he heated coffee and made toast. He tried to remember how much he had had to drink the night before.

By noon Mrs. Beck hadn't come, and this was her payday. "To hell with it," he grunted, wrote out a check for her and left it on the sink-board, and got his hat. He had an appointment for lunch with Rathbone, and just time enough to get to the magazine office to pick him up.

Hanrahan let himself out and down in the elevator. At the corner where the bus stopped realization struck him like a blow on the solar plexus.

There were no autos, no buses, no pedestrians. The street was absolutely empty.

He stood staring, fighting panic. With an effort he choked his terror down.

There was a drugstore on the corner. He opened the door and went in. The place was deserted —no clerks, no customers, the goods piled unguarded on the

counters. Shaking, Hanrahan made it to a phone booth. He put in his dime, heard the dial tone, dialed Rathbone's number, heard two rings. Then the ringing stopped.

There was no sound of a receiver's being lifted, no voice, just silence. He waited a long time, then he hung up slowly. His money was not returned.

Stealthily, as if he were commiting a crime, Hanrahan left the booth and moved to the next one. He looked up the number of the public library and dialed it. The same thing happened—three rings this time, then utter silence, no answer to his queries.

He would give it one more chance. All the phones couldn't be out of order. This time he would call the police.

There had been three phone booths in a row when he went in to call Rathbone.

Now there was only the middle one from which he had just emerged. The two on either side of it had vanished.

WEAK with fear, Hanrahan rushed from the store out into the unpopulated street, and stumbled back to his apartment.

The living room had been tidied and his bed had been made. Almost afraid to look, he went to the kitchen to see if Mrs. Beck was there. She wasn't. Had she come and already gone again? He glanced at the sink-board to see if she had taken the check.

The check was gone. But so was the sink. There wasn't any sink there any more.

As he stared, the sink suddenly reappeared, with no check lying on the board. And the stove vanished instead. Then the stove popped into sight, and it was the refrigerator which disappeared. Hanrahan waited to see no more; he staggered into his bedroom and locked the door behind him. All the furniture was in its usual place, and stayed there.

For hours he sat by the window, unable to collect his thoughts. The window looked out on the back of another apartment house on the next street. Nobody showed his presence there, even through binoculars.

There was not a sound in his own apartment, or in the one next door through the thin connecting wall.

At three o'clock a thought struck him. He forced himself to unlock the door and go into the empty living room. He found a radio station with a news broadcast and tuned it in.

It was on, all right. The announcer was giving a baseball score.

So there was no unguessable calamity abroad. If anything was wrong, it must be with Hanrahan himself. He went back to his

bedroom. He had had no lunch, but he could not make himself enter the kitchen again.

Seaforth was nearly always in by six, if only to get ready for a date. At six Hanrahan left his bedroom once more.

There was still no one in the living room. He decided to try the radio again; perhaps some incomprehensible disaster had been kept off the air so as not to alarm the listeners, but by this time it might be over and ready to be explained.

Halfway across the room he stopped. He fought down nausea.

The radio and the chair beside it had both gone.

Back in his bedroom Hanrahan had the thing out with himself.

There was his maternal grandmother who had heard the banshee and could see ghosts. There was his father's cousin who had died after years in a mental hospital. There were the two months he himself had spent in a hospital, after Okinawa; "combat fatigue," they called it now, and he had been discharged with a 30 per cent disability.

"So that's that," said Hanrahan grimly, and reached into the bureau drawer for his revolver.

The last thing he ever sensed was the shocking roar.

SEAFORTH searched for a while up and down the street, that Sunday night, and then decided Hanrahan had simply left and gone home. Hanrahan was getting too damned temperamental, he reflected; what innocent thing had he said to set him off this time? Seaforth shrugged and walked leisurely homeward himself. The kitten scampered away.

Hanrahan wasn't in the apartment. Walking off his peeve, presumably. Let him. Seaforth went straight to bed.

He overslept and barely had time in the morning to make himself some breakfast and get to his class. Hanrahan's bedroom door was closed, and he was probably still asleep. Seaforth was in too much of a hurry to find out.

He got back about 12.30, and Mrs. Beck was there. She called to him from the kitchen, where she was washing dishes.

"Mr. Hanrahan left me my check, Mr. Seaforth," she said.

"O.K.," Seaforth answered. It was Hanrahan's week to pay her. Doubtless he'd gone out by now.

The phone rang. It was Rathbone. "Seaforth?" he asked. "You know what's happened to Hanrahan? He's half an hour late for a luncheon date."

"I haven't seen him today," Seaforth said. He felt a little uneasy. But he had an appointment himself, and he had to leave.

He returned shortly before six, mixed himself a highball, and sat

down by the radio for the six o'clock news. Then he dressed and went out again. There was still no sign of Hanrahan.

He got home late and didn't bother to see if Hanrahan was there. They were both busy and often went a day without meeting. But in the morning he decided he'd better check up.

Hanrahan's bedroom door was locked. There was no answer to knocking or calls. After ten minutes Seaforth began to feel scared. He got out a hammer and broke the lock.

There was no one in the room.

VERY late that same Sunday night when Hanrahan had looked in vain for Seaforth and Seaforth for Hanrahan, the kitten's mother slipped out through a basement window and found her young one wandering down the block. She was a sleek, handsome cat, black as Hades. When she caught up with her offspring she cuffed him expertly.

"You little devil!" she meowed. "Where have you been? I told you not to run away again."

The fluffy kitten whimpered.

"I haven't done anything," he whined.

The old cat growled deep in her throat.

"You been fooling around with any humans?" she asked menacingly.

"No, honest I haven't!" said the kitten. "I've just been walking up and down outside here."

"You didn't let a human touch you? Are you sure?"

"Just one, mamma, and all he did was pat me. I remembered what you told me."

"All he did!" The black cat swelled with rage. "The minute I turn my back! You're the stupidest kitten I ever had—you make me wonder who your father could have been. Haven't you any sense at all?"

"He was a nice man, mamma. And I didn't ask him to. He saw me and came right up to me himself."

"Oh, Lord! Go on, get into the house with you. What our old lady will do to you I can't imagine!"

"But why, mamma?" The kitten scuttled away from his mother's claws. "I see all the other cats in the neighborhood being petted by humans—why can't I be? It feels good when you rub against them and they stroke your fur."

"How many times do I have to tell you, you little idiot? You're not just a kitten, any more than I'm just a cat—we're a witch's familiars. What's more, we're both specially conditioned familiars. We're curse-carriers, if you have brains enough to know what that is.

"Do you know what you've

done to that nice man of yours? From now on, once he's touched you with the spell on you, he won't be able to see or hear or feel any living creature, or any inanimate thing that a living being is using, and no living being can ever again see or hear or feel him. Satan only knows what kind of existence he'll have from now on—and all because you're a little flibbertigibbet that disobeyed your mother!"

"Oh, mamma, I'm sorry," mewed the kitten. "Please don't hurt me—honest, I won't ever do it again.

"Please, please—I said I was sorry! Ouch! He was such a nice man!"

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# WESTERN HIGHWAY

**By Clarence Edward Flynn**

THIS is a trail that dusky warriors beat,
And brave explorers charting out new lands,
And pioneers on ever-questing feet,
And skin-clad trappers, and fierce outlaw bands.
Here walked the conquerors of raging streams
And frowning passes on the danger way.
Here walked proud men pursuing empire dreams,
The makers of a mighty yesterday.

It is no little thing this road to know.
They were the mighty challenge of an age
Who made it vibrant in the long ago.
In Time's great tale it is a living page.
History wrote in a heroic mood.
It is as though the legions of the dead
Built some strange glory in the solitude,
A way of destiny for us to tread.

A faint urgent whisper reached her ears. "I have come . . . from Hell . . . to you. Hold me! Save me!"

# THE SIN-EATER

*BY G. G. PENDARVES*

LOOK about you! What do you think of this land where the dark experiment we shall watch takes place? This ancient haunted land of Cornwall—unfertile, unfriendly, isolated until last century from the world, even from the rest of England. Old gods, old worships, old forgotten races have died hard and

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lingeringly in this narrow peninsula. Cromlechs, shrines and ruined altars on many lonely hills and desolate moors still remain to remind, to suggest, with dark portents of evil.

Not long ago Black Magic darkened the thoughts and lives of men here, from Land's End to King Arthur's Seat; not long enough to purge the duchy of its evil, not long enough to drive out forces so long dominant.

Apparently — oh yes — apparently only legends remain: legends useful to amuse summer visitors in company with wishing-wells, smugglers' caves, bathing-beaches, old coastguard paths, Roman forts, ancient tin mines, pilchards and clotted cream. Let it go at that. Legends!

In reality this is the story of a master scientist who dealt with human powers which few of us begin to understand. And it is always comfortable to deny the existence of what we don't understand. We demand of science improvement, discovery, bigger and better toys to play with in order that we can more easily forget the briefness of our stay in the playground itself. The science we support is obvious, spectacular, dealing only with matter, dealing with our bodies very specially that they may be bigger, better bodies so that we may stay longer to play with our toys.

But the mind of man! How convenient to forget the sciences that concern the mind of man! The majority have a touching faith in modern psychology as being a complete map to it. About as comprehensive and true a map as those of the world made in the Twelfth Century!

That's as it may be, but most readers will grant, however, the suitability of our background here in Cornwall for this, for almost any imaginable mystery. Look at the broken, towering, gloomy cliffs. They guard memories of bloodshed, violence and tragedy, of wild gales and greedy seas, of battered ships and drowning men, of wreckers more barbaric than Moorish pirates, of smugglers and press-gangs, of long centuries of struggle between man and his enemy, the sea. On this wild coast the breaking tides boom one continuous knell—death!

And inland? Do these bare moors, this stern gray granite give you comfort?

Look closer—closer—at this old fishing-port. It is full of narrow cobbled ways, full of dark-skinned, darkeyed fishermen, their swarming children, their hundreds of cats.

This is the port of Trink. This is where we shall watch a great experiment.

We reach the great iron gates of Lamorna House—follow a

shadowed drive between tall firs that moan and whisper the sea's long dirge—death! death! death!

MARK ZENNOR was dying. He lay in his great carven bed and watched the pair of lovers with hard, merciless eyes. His young wife, Rosaina, and Stephen Lynn, his nephew, secretary and—? What else Stephen was, or would shortly be, was hidden in the dying man's thoughts.

Dying! It seemed impossible to Rosaina. She knew the doctors had given him up, said the patient was hanging on hour by hour by a miracle of will-power. She knew her husband had repeatedly affirmed this. But he seemed to her more awfully alive than ever.

*"Death, where is thy sting?*
*Where grave, thy victory?"*

The words flashed across her confused and terrified thoughts. Hysteria threatened. How ironical, those words, in connection with a death-bed like this! She bit her lip, closed her smarting eyes. Mark's voice stabbed her to control again. Her eyes opened to meet his sharp, cruel stare.

"Permit me to offer my sympathy. This is a most difficult role for you, my dear. Unpardonable of me to subject you to such embarrassment. It should have been so simple, so congenial a task to speed a parting guest. And an inconvenient husband at that! But *my* exit from this world? You feel something is lacking, eh? Now why?—why, Rosaina?"

Why indeed? For the life of her she couldn't formulate her deep uneasiness. Mark really was dying, there could be no question of it; all the doctors and specialists had agreed on that. A great many doctors had come and gone during the week of Mark's illness.

"It's only fair to you and Stephen that I take my departure with a good deal of publicity," he had explained. "My illness is so sudden and so unexpected that rumors might arise as to whether you two had connived at it. With all the drugs I use in my body a post-mortem would be very unconvincing."

It was remarks like this that stuck in Rosaina's mind. And the flicker of laughter in his eyes as he'd said them. At this very moment he—

"You're a fool, Rosaina, but not quite such a fool as Stephen. You at least realize how little you understand my work—my art. And you are afraid. Most wise. My nephew, on the other hand—"

He turned his great head, massive and bold in outline as the carved figurehead of a ship. His

dark-red hair, tonsured like a monk's, was untouched by gray in spite of his eighty years. Under a tremendous brow, his eyes glittered like quartz in strong sunlight. His nose was long, finely cut, extremely sensitive, and, in conjunction with deeply-sunken cheeks and the fine brow, would have stamped him as an intellectual and ascetic had it not been for the mouth. That was a horror, a great bar of ugly crimson across the colorless face.

Stephen Lynn did not meet his uncle's keen, stabbing glance. He sat in the glow of a cavernous red fire across the room, and though ill at ease and resentful of his uncle's characteristically unpleasant way of conducting his death-bed scene Stephen's clever, mobile face showed neither fear nor doubt.

"My nephew," pursued Mark, "is too much a man of the world, of *this* world, to share your misgivings as to the future, Rosaina.

*"Imperial Caesar, dead, and turned to clay,*
*Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.*

"My widow and her wealth would stop a good-sized hole. Exactly!"

A stain of color showed in the young man's face, too pale and sharply drawn for his age and build. But Stephen was a young man of character and ambition. His uncle paid him handsomely. He'd found the resources of Lamorna library invaluable for his own private researches. And there was always Rosaina. The fact of her near and dear presence had made his difficult, often revolting work possible.

He made no reply in speech, but Mark Zennor saw the red blood in his cheeks and sniggered.

"Don't trouble to conceal your face, my boy. And your thoughts are perfectly correct, too. I *am* almost finished, so it's hardly worth while your taking me seriously now. I shall die before midnight."

STEPHEN frowned at the floor between his knees. He'd never got accustomed to his uncle's hateful trick of snatching the thoughts from his brain and putting them into words. He glanced across at Rosaina sitting on the far side of the great curtained bed. How nervous and strained she looked! He'd be thankful when the end came and he could take her away.

"After all, Stephen," the voice from the bed proceeded, "you owe me a good deal. You've done better for yourself here than would have been possible elsewhere. The laboratory I fitted up for your exclusive use. The lines of reasearch I in-

dicated. Your salary. And the beautiful widow I am so obligingly going to leave for you. All these things must be balanced against less congenial aspects of your work under my roof. In fact, I'm hoping you will not grudge a last small service—a mere trifle, I assure you."

Rosaina turned her head sharply. She recognized the note in Mark's voice with a pang of fear. He was going to ask Stephen something important—something of such importance that he thought it worth while to subdue possible opposition with a weapon that never failed him. Her own heart leaped, her pulses thrilled in response to it. Mark's voice! Against all instinct and reason, those who heard *that* note in Mark's voice had no choice but to obey.

"Don't be anxious, my beautiful Rosaina. Indeed, my child, you must not be too sad, too tragic. I assure you there is hope, there is indeed hope!"

She shivered. Hope! What did he mean by that taunt? He knew his death was the one hope she had. He knew how she loathed and feared him, how she had tried to escape. But he would not let her go. And what Mark Zennor wanted he accomplished by methods peculiar to himself. She shivered again at memory of how, in the early days of her marriage, she had tried to run away. Mark had got her back in three days by means of a dream which haunted her during her absence. A very vile little dream, if indeed that whispering obscenity which never left her day or night could be called a dream. Possibly Mark might have used a more accurate term in describing the messenger he'd sent to bring back the runaway.

"Yes, hope! You were thinking on the right lines just now, my Rosaina, when your mind ran on death. I do indeed propose to rob it of its sting. And Stephen shall help me. I leave nothing to chance, to faith. I don't live by faith—that last resort of the inferior mind. I prove everything. I *have* proved everything—everything in this extremely elementary world of ours."

"Proved everything!"

Stephen echoed the words. For a moment he actually believed the monstrous assertion. His own mind seemed to shrink and shrivel, confronted by a knowledge and intelligence brilliant as the noontide sun.

Then he was himself again, but shaken, a trifle fallen in his own esteem until he remembered a reason for his peculiar and absurd emotion. Watching by a dying man was not conducive to perfect functioning of the nerves, more especially when the dying man was his Uncle Mark.

He rallied himself and smiled at Rosaina. She mustn't guess how close he'd been to sharing her own superstitious fear of this megalomaniac.

"It reassures me, Stephen, to see you smile."

Rosaina shuddered at the mad laughter in her husband's eyes.

"You appreciate this death-bed business for what it's worth, a convincing bluff for the ignorant. Objective facts of the most elementary kind are all this so-called scientific age understands. The real experiments are concerned with the spirit—with the *will.*"

Will! At that ominous word Rosaina felt her blood run cold under the costly gold brocade of her gown. Mark insisted always on golden rich materials to set off her honey-gold hair and the matt pallor of her skin. The great emerald, emblem of their marriage, flashed wickedly with each nervous contraction of her hands.

"I am the only man in Europe who needs no faith. I have knowledge. I have mastered the secrets of existence."

Stephen felt completely himself now. Had it not been for Rosaina's obvious apprehensions he'd have started an argument.

"I must say I envy you," he replied. "It must be a wonderful sensation for you!"

"Sensation!"

Zennor's resonant voice gave the word an extraordinary inflection. It expressed all the mad unfathomable derision that danced in the speaker's eyes. He opened a small platinum box, took out a pellet and swallowed it.

"A drug to give that keen edge to my intellect which I find necessary in dealing with you, nephew. I am too much diverted. And I have not much longer now. My—arrangements need scrupulously exact timing. The forces I control are as implacable as they are powerful."

The younger man frowned. He'd not realized quite how mad Rosaina's husband was. He looked at her again with startled apprehension. Good heavens! Was this the sort of thing she'd had to endure? No wonder she'd talked to him so wildly. There really was something in the old devil's voice—in his eyes—something inimical he'd never felt before. What a strong horrible face his uncle had! Curious this was the first time it had seemed malevolent and spiteful. In dying, though, no doubt the face-muscles contracted. Or perhaps the shadow that lay across the bed—

He got up in some haste, stirred the fire to a blaze, threw on a log, turned up a lamp. The shadow over the bed inexplicably remained.

"It's the shadow of death, my boy! Must do the thing properly." Zennor's eyes shone incandescent as a cat's as the fire roared up the chimney. "I promised both of you I'd die within the hour, and I'll keep my word. Death. Funeral. Burial. My mortal body committed to the earth. You two can carry out the whole heathenish sequence in most irreproachable style."

ROSAINA sprang to her feet. Her panic found speech.

"Tell us, tell us quickly what you mean? What is this new trick?—this game you're playing with us?"

Zennor regarded her convulsed features with deep interest.

"You ought to have gone on the stage. Absolutely born for tragic roles! That was perfect! Perfect! I'm grateful for a moment of pure pleasure, Rosaina. It hadn't occurred to me you'd ever give me one again. I never saw you so thrillingly, vitally alive. Beauty! Passion! Exaltation! If a woman hasn't these she's a poor drab nuisance in the world."

Her tortured eyes looked across the bed to Stephen. He was standing by the fireplace. Irritation and some bewilderment showed on his thin tired face now. He didn't understand the awful fear that made Rosaina's face a Greek mask of horror. He didn't understand the crepitation of his own nerves. He didn't understand why his uncle, whom he'd always regarded as a man of brilliant intellect most grossly misapplied and therefore faintly contemptible, should now be inexplicably dominating, even portentous.

The vast shadowy room was very still for a spellbound minute. Huge black candles burned in wooden standards four feet high and stood in a wide semicircle at the foot of the bed. Their wax gave off a faint scent of ambergris. Three uncurtained windows showed a staring moon and hard bright stars in a sky like polished gleaming steel. Rising wind made the dark firs toss and moan about the house. A dog's long dreary howl rose.

"Stephen!"

Rosaina's voice was like the clash of cymbals.

"Stephen! Take care—ah, take care! There is danger! Mark is not dying—not dying, I tell you! It's a trap for you, my darling. Stephen! *Stephen!*"

Zennor's big smooth supple hands flickered in a movement so swift that Stephen couldn't then, or afterward, recall exactly what he thought he saw, whether from the deepening pall of darkness over the bed a wing fluttered, a claw-like hand leaped forth, or if . . . if it was merely an

effect of smoke and flame drawn with sudden swift roar up the great chimney.

Rosaina's hands flew to her throat. She gave a choking cry and fell back in her chair. Zennor's steely gaze turned from her to Stephen.

"Hysteria. I shall be dead in another fifteen minutes in spite of her unwarrantable lack of faith in my promise. You will spare fifteen minutes to hear a dying man's request?"

The cool convincing musical voice checked Stephen. Rosaina was overwrought. She'd had the devil of a time. But now—well, it was only decent to humor his uncle in his last moments.

"If there's anything special, Uncle Mark, anything I can do for you, of course I'll be glad to carry out instructions."

His eyes sought Rosaina. She looked a great deal more like dying than did the man on the bed. Rigid as if bound to her chair, her face, her eyes, her straining throat, every line of her body showed terror bordering on madness.

"She will recover. I shall not."

The words came from the shadow slowly, solemnly. They riveted Stephen's whole attention.

"I am listening, Uncle Mark."

"Then it is soon told. *I wish you to be my sin-eater.*"

The fantastic words meant nothing to the listener. He waited. Mark Zennor's brilliant eyes were turned toward an hourglass set in an alcove near by. Filled with blood-red sand, it was swung between supports formed by two nude figures of transparent amber glass. The thing was of exquisite workmanship wrought by a craftsman whose skill was only equaled by his obscenity.

"The last sands are running out, the last minutes of my life. Soon the glass will turn over. In the moment of its turning I intend to make the change you call death. I have planned this ever since you came here, nephew. It is no question of my eighty years, of failing powers. My brain and body are not affected by time. I learned the small secret of prolonging the life of the body here centuries ago. Oh, it was easy to produce symptoms for the doctors if you're remembering their babble! Sant's the only man who'd have guessed."

His fingers crisped in angry recollection.

"Sant! The only man who might—"

HE glanced again at the hourglass and checked himself.

"I have work that can't be completed on this plane of existence. I am hampered by my body, restricted by its laws. So I shall die."

He caught and held his nephew's eye.

"I ask you only to keep vigil for one hour by my body when I am dead. And then to eat bread, to drink water, and repeat the few words written on this parchment."

He showed a small scroll tied with black tape and sealed. Stephen glanced at the still figure of Rosaina. How ill and queer she looked! It was difficult to think of anything else. His uncle's thick lips twitched in savaged amusement.

"She hears and sees you very well. But she is—er—prevented from joining this last intimate talk between us."

"You've—you've hypnotized her!"

Stephen dashed across the room, took the girl's cold stiff hands, called her name. His frantic efforts might as well have been addressed to the chair on which she sat. He swung back to the mocking, mountainous figure on the bed.

"What have you done to her? You old devil! I'll go and call—"

*"No!"*

Stephen was held in a vise. He could neither speak nor move.

"Unless you swear to obey me, swear to be my sin-eater, Rosaina shall never wake. She shall die in trance as she is now. I can rely on those who serve me to see to it after I am gone. You can't help her any more than you can help yourself now."

Furiously aware of sudden utter helplessness, Stephen heard Mark Zennor's voice. Its deep organ-note filled the room; its terrible music bound his soul in chains.

"Swear, Stephen Lynn! Come close. Put your hand in mine and swear!"

In spite of fiercest effort, Stephen felt himself obeying the voice, the lambent burning eyes that drew him . . . drew him . . .

He was compelled. His slow, reluctant feet moved forward, he began to cross the width of polished floor between fire and bed. It seemed like some tremendous journey. Cold, deadly conviction of loss and loneliness made those few yards of flooring beneath his feet wider than all the deserts of the world.

Rosaina and his love for her, Rosaina's stricken body close beside him, Rosaina and all their winged and shining future faded in that moment of his strange journey to Mark Zennor's bedside, faded to a small cloudy dream . . . insubstantial . . . drifting . . . drifting out of sight . . . out of mind.

MIDNIGHT approached.

The blood-red sands sank low in the hourglass, trickling through a bunch of glass grapes held by an excessively female

figure into the opened mouth of an aggressively male one. When the glass swung over, the sands would flow back in a fashion as original as it was unprintable.

Stephen glanced up at the thing and back to the still figure on the bed.

Thank heaven! His hour of vigil was almost over. An hour. It seemed a lifetime since he had pledged himself, left hand in the dying man's cold strong grip, to carry out his uncle's last wish —to be his sin-eater. What a perfectly silly heathenish little ceremonial! And what peculiarly different things brought comfort to the dying! Certainly this last whim of his Uncle Mark's was outstandingly strange.

Little the dead man had ever cared about his sins! A man who refused to recognize any moral code at all, who never applied the words *good* or *evil* to conduct, who lived for experience alone—any—all experience.

His sin-eater! Fantastic notion! When last wishes had been mentioned, Stephen had imagined something far more formidable, something aimed at separating him from Rosaina. But this sin-eating business was merely a gesture—and a pitiful one considering the dead man's extraordinary intellect.

A baffling incalculable character. Sometimes he'd practised harsh rigid ascetism, reduced his great frame to a skeleton. Sometimes he'd indulged his senses in debaucheries that ought to have killed him—and didn't! He'd used brain and body to their utmost capacity in every conceivable way.

Stephen had known all this before taking on the duties of a secretary two years ago. What he hadn't known, and still didn't believe in, was the reality of the dead man's art. That was his uncle's name for the over-ruling interest of his violent and checkered life. Stephen was a brilliant young man in his own particular line but he never conceived of anything that came under the heading of occult as being more than the rankest imagination. And imagination, he reasoned, belonged to poets and children in its better manifestations, and to drug-fiends and the morally and mentally deficient in its worse ones.

When a man died, argued Stephen, he utterly ceased to be, save as a memory. Death—death of the body was the end of a man as a separate individual. His work alone survived.

His uncle's work! Stephen reflected on it as represented by the many books that bore Mark Zennor's name. He'd read some of them, a few that were written in English and dealt with scientific subjects. He'd been taken out of his depth and had never tackled

the more recondite in German and French. There were books on philosophy in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Hebrew. There were books on music equally beyond his comprehension. He'd tried a volume of poetry once but decided that all the Turkish baths in the world wouldn't make him feel clean after such literary explorations as these.

However, there was one book in the Lamorna library which he had been forced to know from cover to cover. He had made its black linen covers himself and printed every word of the text between them. It was not published, not publishable. It had been his first and most unpleasant task as his uncle's secretary to print this book on the private press that Zennor owned. A short book and a damnable one. The author's references to past vile experiences and experiments, and to others even more monstrous which he intended to carry out, haunted Stephen for months. To his clear young mind such revelations of immense research and familiarity with unspeakable beliefs and practises were lewd expressions of insanity, the excesses of a megalomaniac whose ambitions rivaled Lucifer's.

Finally, however, he grew callous. Profound disbelief enabled him to do his daily work with the detachment of a machine. He ceased even to wonder why his uncle had wasted time and his amazing intellectual powers over such insane and filthy nonsense.

"Yes, filthy nonsense!"

He repeated the words aloud. He was beginning to feel the necessity of reassurance. This vigil was getting on his nerves. Something was wrong with the lamp—it needed refilling, perhaps. His uncle had insisted on lamps and costly special oil for them that made the house reek. Tonight the lamp and the fire too—what was wrong?—everything seemed on the jump. Shadows. Beastly what queer imitations of life a shadow could give! Shadows—in that foul little book—they were said to be—

He thrust back persistent words and images, and glanced toward the bed. The old man looked extraordinary. His arms and hands lay naturally by his side, the fingers crisped a little in the characteristic way they had in life.

His eyes were open.

"Don't close my eyes, remember, Stephen!" he had commanded. "I want to watch you perform the ceremony."

And, although Stephen would have preferred to close those merciless bright eyes, he had given his word and could not bring himself to break it. He tried, however, to be mocking at

his obedience, to be watching, waiting . . . waiting . . .

He attempted once more to reason about the thing.

"It's merely reflex action. The old man died believing in all his sticky little devil-worshipping ideas. He died happy in the thought that he was pushing all the results of his highly colored life on to my shoulders and went off believing this sin-eating business would square his accounts. That explains the peculiar expression in his eyes. And that half-smile!"

He frowned, stared.

"It certainly seems more pronounced. Probably it's those drugs he poured into himself to keep going as long as he wanted. When the rigor passes his muscles will relax. Nasty look on a dead face though—very nasty. Still it's perfectly explainable—perfectly!"

He wrenched his gaze from those fixed, sightless eyes. Sightless! It was hard to believe they really were that.

"He knew what he was about when he made me promise not to close them. Damned if the old devil's not at his old games even now he's dead. Trying to hypnotize me."

He moved restlessly, tried to laugh. The face of the dead expressed considerably more amusement than did his own; yet remembrance of this trick of his uncle's brought relief to the watcher. Hypnotism! That was it. That covered everything, especially the strange sensations he'd had just before his Uncle Mark had died. Idiotic to have laid himself open to it—to have let imagination ride him so completely.

Thanks be! It had passed off almost at once.

Probably Rosaina's collapse had unnerved him, made him susceptible to suggestion. It was the very fist time his uncle had ever caught *him* napping. His self-congratulation was unclouded by suspicion of design in this fact.

Rosaina! He looked at her. Still as a statue, white, frozen. Nothing he said or did could wake her.

"When you've fulfilled your promise, Stephen! She won't wake until then," Zennor had repeated. "Not until the hour is up and you've become my sin-eater."

Somehow he felt less concerned about her now—the strained white face, the terror-filled eyes, the slender limbs held as if in bonds! Hypnotized. He felt a faint contempt for the weakness that made her so easy a victim, even a sort of respect for the dominance of a will that could, even after death, exert its influence. Anyhow, if she were in a trance she felt nothing. No

use his agonizing over her. Not long now to wait.

A FAINT whirring of machinery drew his glance to the hourglass. Its last grains had run out. Chimes of midnight sounded from some deep-toned village clock. Noiselessly, smoothly, the big hourglass turned in its half-circle.

He got to his feet, stood beside the dead body. At last he'd get the thing over and done with.

The first red grains ran back as he stretched out a hand toward the bared breast of the corpse. Those eyes! The light in them still. Surely—surely the dull fire couldn't strike that gleam in them? No, of course not. It was those infernal candles at the foot of the bed. Probably the wax contained some filthy ingredient that was affecting his eyes. Nothing his Uncle Mark had used was normal or natural. He was forever experimenting on his own senses and on other people's. The whole house ought to be burned down. Fire was the only purge for so much dangerous rubbish. That book in the library—everything suggestive, indecent. Yes, fire was the proper cure. He was so furious, so humiliated by the repugnant fear he felt of touching the corpse that he suddenly shouted at it:

"I'd like to burn the house down and you in it!"

Naturally there was no reply. Or was there? Didn't the dead man's grinning lips draw back a trifle further? Didn't the fixed eyeballs roll slightly in their sockets to meet his frantic angry gaze?

He cursed himself for a fool. A fool to have promised to carry out this fantastic post-mortem charade. A fool not to break his promise now. And fool most of all to get the wind up like this if he *was* going to do it.

He forced himself to take the parchment roll from under the dead man's hand.

He broke its black seal, unwound the tape, opened out the crackling sheet. His face darkened as he read the strong black lettering. This thing that seemed so childish and superstitious an hour ago began to assume a new aspect in its fulfilment. And for this, Stephen cursed his imagination now, rather than his lack of it in the first place.

Consulting the parchment from minute to minute he began to obey the directions written there.

"Take up the wafer that is in the mazar-bowl," he read. "Mazar? I suppose he means black-cherry wood."

Yes, there was the small wooden bowl on a table beside the bed. He took out of it a wafer whose smooth black surface was pricked in a deadly de-

vice he failed to understand. His fingers, colder than the dead flesh he touched, placed the wafer on the bared breast of the corpse.

Another, smaller bowl stood filled with water. And this also he put on the dead man's breast.

Then, turning to the table again, he dipped his trembling fingers into a handful of salt around which five minute black candles burned in a circle. Their tiny flames licked up fiercely as his hand was outstretched above them. Pain set his whole body on fire. He stood rigid, agonized. Suddenly the burning ceased. Only in his brain a strange sense of heat remained as if the fiery ordeal had left a spark upon the altar of his mind.

The salt he had taken up he now sprinkled upon the wafer and into the water. Once again he consulted the written words, put out an obedient hand, let it fall with a groan.

"No! No!" he muttered. "I don't like this business. It's—there's something I don't like about it! I believe he's—"

Against his will he looked up, caught the fixed dead eyes that seemed so piercingly to watch him, and again he felt a sense of utter powerlessness. Again, as when he first agreed to be his uncle's sin-eater, his resolution fatally relaxed. The fire in his brain dissolved the half-formed premonition of his danger.

Before the hard cold glitter in the dead man's eyes his own fell. He raised the bowl of water and held it out with stiffy extended arms toward the corpse. His hoarse strained voice came haltingly:

*"I drink this water, with salt that can compel, that your sins may be washed from your soul. Let them flow—as this water—from you to me. I receive the great darkness of your sins. I give the light of my soul that your own may walk in it forever."*

He shuddered violently as he turned, bowl in hand, to each of the four corners of the room, repeating the form of words each time. Then, putting the water to his lips he drained it and tossed the bowl away.

And now he knew no trick of candle or firelight had set that flame of wicked malice dancing in the eyes that held his own, or brought those capering shadows all about him. The fire within his brain worked like madness. He was part of all this now. He loved as much as loathed it. He desired as greatly as he feared to share the dead man's secret power.

He took up the wafer, turned again to each corner of the darkening room to repeat the written formula. Now his voice rose loud

and defiant as he faced the corpse:

*"Mark Zennor, with this bread and the salt that has power to seal my vow, I eat your sins. Give me the burden of them. I take their weight on my soul. I, your sin-eater, give my soul's rest for yours eternally."*

He put the wafer in his mouth. It crumbled to salt dust on his tongue. As he swallowed it he was aware that the flame of life within him was rising higher—higher—higher. And, with its soaring, towering, leaping life, he seemed to touch the stars. Then, with awful downward plunge, he sank—swift—swooning — down to thunderous abysmal dark. . . .

"STEPHEN! Stephen!"

He roused himself. Rosaina was kneeling by his side where he lay on the floor. Her arms were about him. Her tears fell on his face. He got up, drawing her also to her feet, and looked down at her tragic face. He felt as though he'd been under the sea, submerged, almost drowned. His fears, his pain, the madness in his brain were washed away.

Rosaina held him with desperate convulsive pressure. He felt the wild beating of her heart against his breast. She couldn't speak. His low murmured words of love seemed to increase her dreadful shuddering agitation.

At last her sobbing breath was stilled, and she leaned against him in utter exhaustion as he stroked her golden shining hair.

"Darling! Dearest!" he whispered. "He's gone at last, left us free, you and me! You and me, my own! Rose! My golden lovely Rose! Love me, love me and forget the rest."

She didn't move or speak. Once she turned to kiss the fingers that rested on her hair, and the cold pressure of her lips startled him—her clasp, her kiss were so despairing. Then she cried out again:

"Stephen! Stephen! *Stephen!*"

"Darling! I am here—holding you—close—close. Why do you call as if I were leaving you?"

"Stephen! You are—you are leaving me!"

She pushed him away, stood with white tragic face and haunted eyes.

"Oh, Stephen, my dear!—my dear! Don't you understand at all what you have done?"

"You mean that barbaric little ceremony? Dearest, you simply can't believe there's anything in that! You might as well believe in ghosts and witches and devils —or—or anything," he finished lamely.

"I do believe in devils. He was a devil—served by devils. Didn't you see what held me bound this

past hour, Stephen? Didn't you *see?"*

"The old man hypnotized you. I tried to wake you up—I tried repeatedly."

"You saw nothing—felt nothing when you touched me? Oh, it's come, it's come at last—our punishment for loving. How fast he's got you now! He'll drag you down to hell—down to hell."

SHE went close to him again, looked up into his frowning bewildered face.

"His sin-eater. *His sins*. Have you any idea what Mark's sins were? No! How could you—when even I—although I can't sleep for remembering, for remembering—even I can only guess at—"

Her face grew ashen but she moved back from his imploring arms.

"Wait, wait, Stephen darling! Oh, try to understand—try to believe me. It was real, that ceremony of the sin-eater. You *have* taken Mark's sins from him."

"You really believe that?" His tone was the more emphatic for a cold creeping doubt that chilled him now. "Darling, you can't be so mediaeval and superstitious as that!"

"I know, I know I'm right," she urged. "You're in hideous danger. Oh, if you believed me even now it might be possible to—"

She broke off, seized his hands and pressed them to her breast.

"Stephen! Stephen! Of course, I remember now what he said to me about Mark's illness, and that I must tell him if—Come quickly, quickly! We'll ask him to help you."

She clasped him in an agony of relief.

"Mr. Sant—don't you remember?—don't you remember he said Mark was not ill? He promised to return before any crisis arose if he could."

"No, I forget all about it. But he'd think me a fool to go to him with this tale.

"Uncle Mark was mad and you can be sure Sant knew it. He's the most celebrated alienist in Europe. Sant would count me as a patient if he thought I believed this. What can it signify—a few silly words gabbled over a dead body? Look here, Rosaina, let's get out of this room and talk somewhere else; even the sight of his corpse—"

She glanced over her shoulder as they went, hand in hand, to the door. Her loud cry seemed to the man to come from his own lips as he turned and stared also at the bed.

"Look! Look! Ah-h-h! Look at him now!"

He dropped her hand, strode to the cavernous bed. The face

of the corpse was the face of one utterly at peace. Its bright staring eyes were closed, its lips gravely folded, every line that lust and pride had deeply stamped was smoothed away.

It was the face of one whose soul had found its rest.

Rosaina pressed close to Stephen. She stood staring . . . staring. . . . Her white trembling lips whispered over and over:

"You are his sin-eater—his sin-eater—his sin-eater! You have taken the evil from him."

They turned to look at each other. Her eyes searched his in frantic love and agony, dreading to see in them what he had taken from the dead. He returned her look. Faint impatience pricked him. He'd had enough melodrama for one night, he felt. Rosaina was—what had his Uncle Mark once said of an Arab woman he'd bought in Touggourt? Oh, yes! "Zobeide, my dear nephew, was a—"

He pulled himself up. Good heavens!

What had brought that lewd story to his mind—and in connection with Rosaina? He turned in horrified contrition.

"Dearest, you must come away. This place reeks of him and his beastliness."

"OH, YES, please! Yes, we'll come at once. No, not here! I can't talk to you in *his* house."

Sant put down the telephone receiver, stood gazing at it. His mind was roused to extraordinary activity. His memory was gathering up facts, proofs, experience from the immense field of his knowledge. The whole situation was changed now.

The great tawny Persian cat, lying with head sunk between straightly extended forepaws, felt a break in the continuity of his peace. He looked up, gave a small inquiring trill of protest. His master picked him up and tucked the satin head beneath his own chin.

"Hároon Er-Rasheed, my old friend, it's bad news—the worst possible news! Mark Zennor is dead."

He held the cat so that he might look into his benevolent peaceful face. The animal rubbed a cold friendly nose against his own.

"Oh, yes, I know I'm clever, my dear. But so is he, most infernally so, and if he's dead it's because he didn't wish to remain alive. For the moment I can't fathom his reasons—that is what we've got to discover."

Hároon Er-Rasheed burrowed his muzzle into the palm of Sant's hand and gurgled consolation.

"Well, I'm glad you believe in me so utterly. It all helps. But we must think—we must think."

With the gentle deliberation approved by that nervously constituted aristocrat he put the big cat down. Turning to his bookshelves he took out a battered volume entitled *The Human Will.* His visitors could not be here immediately, for his house was fairly inaccessible from Trink Village and the motor-road made a very long detour.

As this is the story of Zennor's death and of certain events immediately consequent on that crisis, it would be tedious to go back in any detail into circumstances of how and when these two men had previously come into conflict. The affairs were too elaborate, a great many other people were involved in them, and they had never been in the nature of man-to-man duels. Rather, Sant had interfered, very quietly, very circumspectly on a number of occasions in order to frustrate some of Zennor's ripest and most deadly plans.

By the time a rapid muffled knocking sounded at his front door, Sant had traveled a long journey in his thoughts. His immense power of concentration had marshaled his every encounter with Zennor and criticized each anew. In the light of his last dramatic move, everything Zennor had done or not done assumed less or more importance.

"Yes," reflected Sant aloud, as he rose to let in his visitors. "His death is a retreat in one sense, but it means that he has fallen back on some superior vantage-ground. My task is to discover what it is."

The welcoming light which, from the vestibule of his house, shone like a little star on the lonely hillside, showed Rosaina and Stephen to Sant as he opened his door to them.

Both were changed. He knew that instantly. It was a new and different quality of fear that now whitened the girl's face, aging and withering her inexpressibly. In Stephen's keen alertness there was now an edge of antagonism. A first faint pattern of the dead man's plan began to take shape in Sant's mind.

He led them in to his warm fire, and it did not surprise him to see his cat pressing up against the door as he opened it, but as the creature shot past his legs and away, ears flattened back, tail stiffened in angry fright, the pattern of Sant's thoughts was stamped a trifle more clearly. His eyes took on the gray remoteness of a winter sea, always a sign of intense mental preoccupation with him. He didn't, however, communicate his thoughts, but merely listened to their story and put extremely pertinent questions.

"About that one special book

you recollected when Zennor had died and you were keeping vigil by him. It seems to me very important. I must get hold of that book you printed."

"I suppose it would be a good idea." Stephen felt a peculiar reluctance all of a sudden to part with that black-bound book. "I'll see if I can find it for you."

"Thanks. Tomorrow morning, then."

Stephen was astonished at his own stab of furious anger. He was an even-tempered man and, although he was roused at rare intervals, it took a great deal to make him angry. Also, when that happened, he always felt cold as a block of ice. Never in his life before had he experienced such fiery murderous hate as flared up in him now.

SANT pretended not to see the vivid, if very fleeting, change in the other's face.

A strong revulsion of feeling seized the younger man. "Yes," he begged, "do come and take the thing away. I can't bear to remember I printed it, helped to perpetuate such foulness. It's coming back to me as we talk what it was all about, at least so far as I understood it. When I was working on it I was convinced Rosaina was somehow concerned—the human sacrifice—but there were a good many sacrifices mentioned, and she couldn't have been the same 'golden woman' who died in Persia thousands of years B.C., or a Libyan princess in the time of Alexander the Great, or a slave in A.D. 50! And yet the book—"

Sant's blank calm face effectually concealed his thoughts.

"Yes. Do go on," he encouraged; "this is all most relevant."

"Of course," confessed Stephen, "most of it was gibberish to me. Uncle Mark claimed to have been reincarnated over and over again. He had to find something—or someone to complete a Triad—a mystic perfect Triad. It had to be three who were bound each to the other in some mysterious way. Then he could offer his last sacrifice through the medium of the Triple Link. His great object seemed to be the possession of a Key—"

"The Key of Thoth?"

"Yes. That's what he was after—the Key of Thoth." He met Sant's grave eyes. "It's all pretty much of a jumble in my mind. I didn't understand one word in a hundred. But I do remember that he'd got to have some special sort of co-operation for his sacrifice."

"Stephen! What else—what else?"

Rosaina's voice was sharp with anxiety.

He looked at her rather vacantly, his brows drew together,

he ruffled his thick brown hair. "It was fairly evident that he felt he'd got to the end of his search. There was a lot about his High Priest and the bond of blood to seal his bargain."

SANT'S eyes were very cold, very remote. "I see." He looked intently at the other man.

"Damned if you do!" blazed Stephen suddenly. "It was my uncle's great secret, the goal of all he'd ever done or thought or lived for! No one—*no one* ever so much as guessed at his tremendous success—at the things he'd discovered."

"Stephen!"

Rosaina's cry brought him to himself. She shrank from his touch, turned to Sant with unmistakable appeal.

"He's worn out—as you are." Sant's voice was stern now. "You mustn't show fear, Rosaina, you mustn't feel fear! It will injure him. If your love has any depth and reality you've got to help him. You can't leave him now."

"Leave him?" stammered the girl.

"Certainly. You left him when you turned to me then. Now listen to me, both of you!"

He looked into Stephen's dark eyes. Anger made them glitter. His thin face seemed a trifle squarer, his lips a trifle fuller.

The rough dark hair took a red gleam from the firelight.

"Stephen," Sant put a hand on the other's twitching one, "you're afraid too and you're giving ground to the enemy. It's no use keeping up any sort of pretense about this; we must work together, it's our wills against—the dead!"

"His sin-eater. I am his sin-eater."

Stephen spoke, not in horror so much as in warning and reminder.

"You were ignorant and foolish. You let Zennor trick you once—are you going to let him go on doing it, Stephen Lynn?"

The other got hastily to his feet, held out his hand.

"No!—no! I'm not! No, I'm all right again now and I'll fight him until I die."

"And that won't do, either." Sant gripped him strongly. "You've got to live. You've got to find out how to free yourself."

He turned to Rosaina.

"I won't disturb my housekeeper so late—or so early! It's almost three o'clock in the morning. You shall have my room. There aren't any others ready. Stephen will do very well down here by the fire. I must go to Lamorna House at once."

He spoke with eyes on Stephen's face, saw gratitude and relief suddenly sharpen to sus-

picion. Some sort of struggle was going on in the young man's mind. Sant went off with Rosaina, and returned to find Stephen in hat and coat.

"It might be better if I went back with you, after all. You can—" he hesitated. "Oh—if—of course, if you prefer—no, I'll come! You can keep an eye on me then."

His companion regarded him with absorbed attention.

"Don't you mean you want to keep an eye on me?" he corrected. "Come if you will, by all means."

Again the younger man hesitated, then spoke in slow sulky tones.

"It would be better. The servants would think it queer if Rosaina and I were both here and you in possession at Lamorna House. Uncle Mark left like that!"

"Of course," Sant heartily concurred. "We'll go together."

THEY found Lamorna House abominably quiet—a challenging sinister quiet that met them on the threshold with all the force of swarming invisible assailants in possession of a stronghold. As they went through the hall and up the broad stairs, shadows seemed to peer and watch, to keep guard over the dead.

In the chamber of death they found the tall black candles still burning steadily at the foot of the bed. The head of the corpse lay deeply sunk into the pillows. On its face a yet profounder calm had settled. Sant looked down in silence. He hid his deep disquiet from Stephen, standing beside him; but, turning sharply, he surprised a strange smile dawning in the young man's dark eyes, a smile that spread as Sant watched it—loosening the fine curve of the mouth, aging and coarsening the eager face.

He faced the corpse and spoke a few rapid words under his breath. For a moment the look of infinite calm on Mark Zennor's face seemed to break and alter—as the surface of smooth water is ruffled by a sudden angry gust of wind.

But it was Stephen who answered Sant's words. What he said was unintelligible to himself—the words rushed from between his lips—his hands clenched—his whole body stiffened. Then, under the penetrating steady look with which Sant met his outburst he drew back. His taut muscles slackened. He looked almost stupidly bewildered.

"Sorry! Did you say anything? I felt dizzy all of a sudden."

"I didn't know you spoke Arabic!"

"Arabic!" echoed Stephen. "Why, I don't speak it—don't

understand a word of it. What makes you say so?"

"Only that you cursed me very competently in that tongue just now."

Stephen's bewildered frown deepened to a scowl. "You seem as much off your balance as Rosaina. I've never spoken a word of Arabic in my life."

"Forgive me!" Sant put a hand on his arm. "I'm not playing tricks on you—it is *he* who is doing that. I wanted to prove something and I've done so. Come away. This empty shell he's left—everything here reeks of him — tainted — poisonous! Come, Stephen!"

Outside the room, Sant locked the door and pocketed the key. Instantly his companion's eyes blazed with fury, but it died down and faded at the older man's friendly smile and touch.

"Look here, Sant, I can't stand this, I'm all in a fog—can't seem to get a grip on myself. Can you give me something to make me sleep? If I could sleep, forget the last few hours, I might—"

"The very best thing," agreed the other.

THEY went downstairs again. In his own private study, Stephen switched on an electric radiator and produced drinks. An hour later he was sleeping heavily, stretched out in an easy-chair. Sant made for the library; he knew he must get hold of Mark Zennor's book before he was prevented.

He found it at last, sat down at a desk, and began to examine it. He read on and on. Dawn crept up to the tall, uncurtained windows. Warmth of the rising sun touched his cheek as he sat, fell on the printed page before him.

He got to his feet abruptly and flung up the nearest window, thrust out his head to breathe deeply of the keen salt air from the Atlantic. In the east a streak of yellow kindled behind glimmering ghostly bare trees. He faced the strong clear radiance. Ah! How good the sharp sweet air—the untainted dawn! How cleansing after the abominable pages of Zennor's book! He leaned against the window-frame, half closed his eyes, surrendered his tired mind and body to the spell.

A robin warned him. Young and bold and hungry, it fluttered to the broad sill on which his hand rested.

Cheep! Cheep! Cheep! *Cheep!*

Sant's eyelids lifted. He caught sight of a shadow on a side-pane of the bay window and turned in time to snatch up the open book. Stephen stood beside the desk, a queer stiff automatic figure, his eyes wide open but glazed with sleep. As

the book was withdrawn his lips drew back in a savage grimace and a blaze of vivid hate shone through the dreaming dark eyes. The hand outstretched to pick up the book drew back with crisping crooked fingers like the talons of a bird of prey.

Sant leaned forward, looking deep into the black fixed eyes of the sleep-walker.

"No, Mark Zennor—not yet! I stand between you and this man you have betrayed. I fight for Stephen Lynn—for his body and for his soul."

Again hate leaped like white fire in the fixed eyes, and for a moment the mask of Stephen's face quivered, altered, expanded to hideous semblance of the dead.

Sant drew closer, put all his will into repulsing the assault. "Not yet," he repeated. "You dare not take possession of this human body now. The four hands of Adda Nari still hold the four elements from your grasp. You are not yet wholly freed from the Wheel. The laws of human life still bind and limit you."

Fiery hate died to blankness in the eyes opposite his own. He blew lightly in the set young face.

"Wake, my dear boy—wake!"

Stephen was bewildered, annoyed, and very tired.

"What's it all about? Sleep-walking! Never done that before. Heavens! What a beastly draft!"

He slammed down the open window against the still twittering robin and rang a bell.

"Those lazy good-for-nothing servants! Snoring away upstairs. They can jolly well come down and do their bit. I'll have enough on my hands now with funeral arrangements and all the rest of it."

He looked far more exhausted than before he'd slept.

"What were you working at? That book of my uncle's—eugh! Better burn it—burn the whole library—everything!"

"Yes, I agree, but not until I've come to the end of the trail I'm following; not until I know how strong a link he made to bind you to him."

"That sin-eating charade?" Stephen's look was derisive. "Y'know we all got the wind up pretty badly last night. No man could believe in such mumbo-jumbo—not now, in broad daylight. Last night was different. After watching Uncle Mark all those hours—and he was a—well, he's gone now, no need to dissect his unpleasant character more than necessary. Anyhow last night's over and done with! As to the rest—"

"You mean you no longer feel in any danger?"

"Danger? No, except of mak-

ing a fool of myself. Last night he hypnotized Rosaina and I believe he put some sort of a 'come hither' on me too. Making the most of his last hours I suppose. I don't want to think of, or talk about, or remember last night any more."

"Perfectly natural and normal, but unfortunately your attitude gives Mark Zennor a clear field."

"What—with me!"

Stephen stared, then burst into a laugh.

Sounds of steps in the hall interrupted him.

"One of the Seven Sleepers at last—butler probably," he went on. "Better go and tell him about Uncle Mark. He'll want to warn the maids and trot round pulling down blinds, etc. Servants adore deaths and funerals and all the gloom and wreaths and hushed voices and all the rest of it. There won't be tears, at least. No one in the wide world could regret Uncle Mark's death. There's the telephone, that'll be Rosaina—hope she slept better than I did, poor darling!"

IT WAS after the funeral that Sant missed Stephen.

"I can drive the car, of course," he told Rosaina as he tucked a rug about her knees. "But—"

She gave a shiver, nor was it the keen north-east wind that chilled her.

"We can't wait here in the churchyard for him. Let's go back."

A crackling log-fire and Sant's big yellow cat gave them welcome. Rosaina sank to a chair by the leaping flames and tossed her hat on the rug. She'd cast aside all the rich flaunting golds that Mark had insisted on, and in a dark tweed suit she looked less sophisticated and considerably more tired and fragile.

Hároon Er-Rasheed inspected her hat with deep interest and a running commentary of sounds peculiar to himself, then leaped to her knee.

Sant smiled down on them both.

"Not much of you visible now. I must see that Zennor's book is safe before looking for Stephen."

He crossed over to a bookcase and pulled out from behind a row of dusty folios a box clamped with silver, unlocked it with a key on a bunch in his pocket.

The box was empty!

"Gone! Stephen evidently made straight for it. It had a preface with elaborate detailed instructions for reaching the hidden entrance to a vault or crypt beneath Lamorna House—Zennor had converted it into a sort of chapel."

She stared up at him.

"The book! Instructions! D'you think Stephen's gone down to that horrible place?"

"Sure of it. He's been trying to do it ever since Zennor's death. I dogged him like his own shadow—he'd no chance until this afternoon. I saw him slip away from the graveside, but I couldn't run after him then.

"I've made a copy of those instructions." He put a hand into his breast-pocket and drew out a few thin crackling sheets from a case. "Impossible to find the place without this key. I'll have to follow at once."

"I must come too. Yes!—yes!" she got to her feet impetuously. "I can't wait here alone. You don't know what horrible thoughts I have."

"Believe me, I do know, but I ask you to stay. The danger is acute for all three of us, most of all for Stephen. For his sake I must go alone. I'm not powerful enough to give you protection if sudden attack came. If you hinder me or distract me and I fail—you and he are also lost, remember."

She met his eyes bravely.

"You're very clever, and very strong. I believe in you with all my heart. And I'll do my best to—to believe in myself too. But bring Stephen back to me! Oh, bring him back!"

"Bring Stephen back to me!" An hour later her passionate appeal echoed in Sant's ears as if Rosaina's strained white face still looked into his, while eyes and lips implored, "Oh, bring him back to me!"

On the threshold of a vast and vaulted chapel he stood cold and stiff as the carven monstrosities within it, his eyes fixed on a great altar that faced the entrance. Before the altar a man was standing—a man who elaborately genuflected and abased himself. The man was Stephen Lynn.

Sant, who knew the value and the meaning of each gesture, knew also that he was too late to interfere.

"It would kill him outright now," he murmured; "he's in trance. Zennor's taken complete control. He means to strike at once without giving me time to prepare. Yet the Universal Agent turns to its ebb! He's broken his Rule. He means to sacrifice before his Hour."

He took a few steps into the heavy perfumed gloom. What light there was beat down upon the altar-steps, above which a great metal globe hung, suspended in midair by magnetic force, a globe that received long shafts of light from concealed sources and gave them off again in dazzling hypnotic points of fire.

Sant carefully avoided raising his eyes. As carefully he moved

forward, choosing his steps over the bizarre mosaic of the marble floor. He knew the deadly trap of the symbolic tree whose reversed branches spread under his feet. He knew what dark magic lent iridescent gleam to the peacocks set within their topaz circles. His lips murmured the Words and a Word as he trod between the stippled ochreous coils of two serpents intertwined. His hands moved in strange rapid gestures as he followed a narrow track of alternating black and yellow tiles, setting each foot on the black, advancing with the swaying balance of a tight-rope walker.

And now he halted. On the chapel pavement before him glowed a full moon, red, ominous as spilt blood. He anxiously examined it. If the moon revealed— Yes! So faint that only an initiate might discern its awful significance, an ovoid luminous shadow moved within the confines of its own circumference, vaporous, restless, potent, dread symbol—the Orphean Egg.

Sant waited, watched a curl of bluish mist rise from the full moon's strange matrix, stood like a stone as it curled about his feet, his knees, his body, his stiffly erect head. Only with his will might he control this force —creator and destroyer before the earth was formed. Behind the dreadful veil that hung about him, his face showed the grimness of the ordeal. Vapor swirled and eddied swifter, denser every moment. Sant knew the pains of death, the pangs of rebirth, but he endured, and at last stood free.

Back to its living source the vapor sank as he moved forward to the lowest altar-step. He had received a baptism, and nothing in this place, dedicated to evil, might harm him in this hour.

He looked up instantly at the altar. The spare young figure knelt in rigid stillness now and every line expressed tense prodigious effort of concentration. A voice continuously rose and fell, but not Stephen's voice —the timbre was fuller and more richly modulated, a trained and powerful instrument whose deep notes held the sound of far-off stormy seas.

It was Mark Zennor's voice that rose and fell—rose and fell in magic compelling cadences! Zennor calling on his dark gods, reiterating his impious vows, drawing to his service a vast army of the damned.

Velvet-shod, Sant moved another step upward. And now he blotted out his own personality that it might make no impingement on the etheric waves of evil which the worshipper was drawing to himself. On all sides he felt strong pressure of occult power—subservient, dominated

by the man at the altar above him.

"Bring him back to me!"

The words thrilled through his brain, for he could not obey them now. This man kneeling by the great Stone of Sacrifice was Stephen Lynn's human habitation merely. Within it, controlling, drilling an unaccustomed body to its ritual, was Mark Zennor's proud satanic brilliant mind.

"Bring Stephen back to me!"

Impossible now. Zennor had long ago too thoroughly prepared his ground, too completely trapped his victim from the first moment of their contact. He listened intently. The words rapped out firmer, quicker, more peremptory now. The climax approached.

The great chapel, circular in shape, had walls that rose curving, darkly luminous, satin-smooth as the petals of a vast black tulip, to meet a vaulted roof—their polished surface broken by squat archways behind which darkness lay like a crouching beast of prey.

Above the huge slab of the altar-stone was a reredos of red alabaster, a screen some thirty feet by ten. It was powerfully illumined from behind, so that its carving stood out in bold relief and a trick in the lighting gave a sinister effect of constant movement.

This screen was a vivid presentment of a human sacrifice. Bound on the stone-altar, a woman appeared to writhe and quiver. Her long bright hair rippled down to a deep trough about the altar-base. Into this same trough trickled a thin dark stream of blood from a knife which pierced the victim's body. About the altar stood tall candles whose flames danced in frenzy.

And behind the candles' flare and flicker, at each of the four corners of the altar, a veiled figure towered. Menacing, gigantic, these figures were the only immovable objects on the screen, and they achieved by their fateful stillness—in contrast with the surge and movement of all else in the picture—an effect of final inescapable doom. Dark crescent moons poised above each veiled head of these four attendant genii bearing Hebrew characters which read—EARTH. WINTER. NIGHT. DEATH.

And now Sant saw the black-clad figure—the body of Stephen Lynn, torn and wrenched, trembling from head to foot in diabolic ecstasy, arms flung wide, head bent backward so that light from the suspended globe beat full and fiercely down upon the upturned face. Louder—louder rang the great triumphant organ voice, pealing out into the unclean silence of the chapel's gloom, beating against

the curved and shining walls which sent back clashing pæans of tremendous harmony—

Thus have I conquered, ye Genii of the Twelve Hours!
Thus are all things subdued to my Will!
By wisdom I have pierced Truth.
By intelligence I have cast down idols.
By strength I have bound Death in chains.
By patience I have fathomed the Infinite.
Now is the Universe wholly revealed to me.
Ye Terrible Ones! Princes of the kingdoms and heavens of Pharzuph, of Sialul, of Aeglun, of Aclahayr,
I, who have worshipped and obeyed, shall serve no more.
Princes of Earth, of Air, of Fire, of Water,
The Four Elements you rule are as dust under my heel.
I am invulnerable—beyond Death and Change forever.
The six wings of Bereschott cover me.
The Rock of Yesod beneath my feet.
*Bow down in homage! BOW DOWN!*

•

Sant, his eyes on the tense convulsed figure, saw it sway. Its outflung arms dropped.

The dark head leaned back—back until Sant could see its greenish pallor and half-veiled eyes. Rigid, entranced, the spirit within him caught up into dark swooning ecstasy, Stephen fell back slowly, slowly into Sant's waiting arms.

"FRIDAY afternoon! A few more hours, Adrian—only a few hours now."

Sant glanced at Rosaina, got up from his chair and began to walk up and down his study. Presently he lighted a pipe, let it go out between his clenched teeth as he paced to and fro. He looked out across his garden where violets, anemones and jonquils braved February winds and tall daffodils danced to its piping. His absent gaze followed the course of a valley and rested at last on the stretch of ocean beyond. Gray, turbulent, troubled as his own thoughts, the Atlantic lay under a leaden sky. His brooding look dwelt on it as if in this vast element he found ease for his soul.

"Adrian!"

He turned back to Rosaina, sitting by the fire, his heart contracted with pity at sight of her. How altered since Zennor's death! Not all the tragic years of her marriage had broken her as these few days of torturing anxiety for the man she loved.

Sant's burden grew heavier as he met her eyes; she looked so lost, so wild, so grief-stricken; her body seemed transparent in the firelit dusk; her golden hair was lifeless and faded, the deli-

cate lines of face and neck painfully evident, the amber eyes two deep pools of weariness. Body, mind and spirit could endure little more. And yet they *must!* And tonight. There could be no halt in the tremendous impetus of the occult rhythm of events. Zennor, through his chosen medium, Stephen Lynn, could not himself alter the impending climax now. Tonight he gained all, or lost all. There was no middle course.

He had challenged the Four Ancient Ones, and must prove their master or be for ever enslaved. Tonight he must achieve the goal for which he had striven since his first incarnation on earth by offering the Perfect Sacrifice to complete the Triad of his protection.

Tonight! That much Zennor had revealed through Stephen on the day of the funeral while Sant watched in the chapel. And because it was tonight, Sant knew his enemy feared him and his influence; for Zennor's own baneful star would not be at its zenith until the next moon's waning, in the Tenth Hour, called Malaen.

The genii of that Hour were strong and slaves to Zennor's will. They had been the heat of his blood, the shadow of his body, the breath of his nostrils when—in his first life on earth—he had, in shaggy beast-like form, run on all fours through forests of the north, forests dug up now as coal from under the crust of the world. Tonight these genii would serve him well. The Hour was favorable—but less favorable than the Tenth Hour, called Malaen. Zennor would have been stronger in the next moon's waning.

He went back to Rosaina, drew up a chair beside her. No hint of anxiety showed in the tranquil face he turned to her. He did not doubt her courage now, but he doubted whether the frail hold she had on life would carry her through the ordeal required of it. And she must live. *She must defeat Zennor on this plane while in the flesh.* Divorced from her body, he could not help her. Her ego and Stephen's too would be incorporated with Zennor's, made one with his damned soul.

She voiced his thoughts.

"I shouldn't have lasted another twenty-four hours. Another night. The night, oh, God! Adrian!"

He bit hard on his pipe-stem and nodded.

"Even though you sat outside my door to keep watch, to prevent his coming to me, he sent his devils to torment me. Your drugs gave sleep to my body but my spirit suffered. In the shadows—in the silence I could see my body lying there, while I—

myself—was forced to listen to what They said—what They said!"

"The main thing was that you slept. Your reason was saved in spite of all he could do."

He had never let her see how perilous he knew those dreams of hers to be. He only marveled at the strong beautiful balance of her mind that retained its sanity in spite of them.

A BUMP at the door heralded the sturdy old housekeeper with a tea-tray. She was the only servant Sant had permitted to stay on since the ceremony he had witnessed in the chapel. He refused to expose two younger maids to the danger of Stephen's presence in the house, or, rather, to the satanic malice of the mind now in possession of Stephen's body.

"I'll go myself to let Mr. Lynn know that tea is ready," he told the old servant.

Mrs. Poldhu nodded. She was a rather formidable old woman, afraid of no one and given to expressing her opinions very forcibly indeed. She'd summed up Stephen as "the spit of that old toäd, his uncle Mark Zennor" and had flatly refused to speak or look at him.

"Plaze yourself, sir. Tesn't no consarn o' mine."

Sant left Rosaina setting out the tea-things. Hároon Er-Rasheed lay before the fire, bestowing passionate attention on one large paw which failed to meet his standards of cleanliness. Mrs. Poldhu waddled off to get more coal for the dying fire.

Sant searched the garden in vain. Satisfied that Stephen was no longer there, he hurried indoors again. He hadn't been in the least concerned about the tea question but had seen, from the window, that Stephen was warily approaching a gate on which a blackbird sang in the dusk. Sant didn't wish a repetition of a savage little incident he and Rosaina had witnessed yesterday when Stephen had revoltingly injured a dog that had snarled at him.

That was his voice! Sant hurried. The door of the study, where he'd left Rosaina, was open.

"Stand still, little fool!"

The words rang out.

"This is to punish you for locking me out at night. Now, you yellow beast—*jump!*"

Sant leaped to the door and was in time to see Hároon Er-Rasheed between Stephen's hands, his belly flattened to the ground, ears back, golden eyes black with terror. At the word "jump!" the animal shot forward as if from a gun.

Rosaina stood, white, agonized, unable to stir a muscle. Her shriek and Stephen's laugh

synchronized with Sant's lightning dash. He caught up the yellow cat from the fire on which it crouched, its eyes glazed and fixed on Stephen's face.

The animal stubbornly resisted Sant. It fought to free itself, struggled furiously to obey the will of the mocking devil in Stephen's eyes. Sant held it in iron hands, and faced its tormenter.

"Mark Zennor!" his voice was barely a whisper. "You exceed your powers. Release this animal—I lay my command on you!"

In Stephen's eyes such cold blind hatred flared that Rosaina cried out again. But Sant moved nearer to his enemy, stared him between the eyes—stared until the dark fire in them was quenched, until their lids drooped. In sullen obedience his hand brushed the big cat's head. He muttered a low-breathed word.

The Persian jumped half the width of the room, halted to turn eyes of blazing yellow fire on Stephen, dashed like a crazy thing through an open window, flashed across a lawn, up over a wall, and away.

Stephen also vanished from Rosaina's sight.

He went slowly, but his exit was even more spectacular than that of the unfortunate beast. Again she cried out in stark terror, for he disappeared without moving at all.

"He is here with us, Rosaina. He is perfectly visible to me. But you are, in part, subject to him. He has intoxicated your vision by a trick. *Will* yourself to see him—here, take my hand."

A touch of it, and she regained control. She saw Stephen walking toward the door.

SANT looked after him as he went from the room.

"He lost control too. I've tried for that revelation from the start. Oh, it was an infinitesimal moment of anger merely, but enough—enough to work on. He's at a disadvantage in his borrowed flesh."

Rosaina trembled, but with anger now, rather than fear.

"Adrian! Your poor cat—won't you go and look for him?"

Her indignation burned so fiercely that she couldn't fathom his apparent indifference. He gave her a long keen look.

"You are very angry. Good! It will stimulate you. But don't worry about Hároon. Mercifully he wasn't injured; the fire was almost out and his fur's thick. He'll forget when—when we've saved Stephen."

She was goaded to new activity. The shock of the beautiful friendly beast's punishment, remembrance of his glazed eyes fixed on Stephen's grinning face, and his shining yellow fur with gray smoke curling up about his

body, stung her to fierce anger and revolt.

"You're right. He shall not take Stephen from me—he shall not! I'll fight, I'll fight to the end now. That poor cat's eyes—Stephen shall never . . . oh! I'm ready, Adrian! That devil shall not win!"

He knew her present condition could not last, but it all helped. Anger would die down, her mood of hot reckless indignation cool. Only staying-power counted. But this would strengthen her will. Everything turned finally on that.

"There's work for both of us to do before midnight. And I want to emphasize once more that it's very important you should go of your own free will tonight. I must remain here, working for you, helping to strengthen your will with my own. But it is Zennor's chosen Hour and I may not interfere with what he does. Don't evade Stephen. Offer yourself a free victim for the sacrifice. And concentrate ceaselessly, ceaselessly on your purpose to save Stephen."

"Yes! Yes!" she whispered, "I must hold him! Save him!"

"Hold him, save him," emphasized her companion. "And now there's no time to lose. You've got those books and papers? Good. Concentrate for your life—and his. No need to lock ourselves in tonight. Stephen will be at Lamorna House—until he comes for you."

He was at once absorbed, drawing strange symbols on ancient brittle papyri where faint tracery of lettering showed. After examining these faint marks through a glass for minutes at a time, he repeated them aloud. At the last word—all he said being perfectly unintelligible to the girl—he would scratch a new sign on the papyrus under his hand with an alder twig which he kept charred at a naked flame on his desk.

He'd been at this for two days and two nights, slaving like a man possessed, muttering, writing, glaring at the dirty old papyri, transported to a world Rosaina couldn't conceive of.

She recollected the yellow Persian's queer interest in these literary labors, how he'd leaped up at the faint rustle of twig on paper when a new symbol had been drawn, how his eyes, their pupils distended to the edge of the iris, had followed the movements of some invisible moving thing about Sant's chair.

Poor beautiful Hároon! She bent to her task with tightened lips.

BY SLOW degrees she became aware of her surroundings. When first Stephen led her to a throne-like seat, she could make

out nothing in the pungent dusk. Now the great chapel was revealing itself; and, instructed by Adrian though she was, her heart stood still at the revelation.

Her throne was in the exact center of the great circular floor. Behind it, and on either side, curved the shining walls.

Before her stood the altar with its reredos which, from this distance, she saw only as a burning patch of light.

She scarcely glanced at the great dazzling globe of metal in midair, so afraid was she of its will-benumbing magic. She fixed her gaze, rather on the man who moved to and fro before the altar in its refracted rays—going about his awful business.

Her chill, slender hands clasped the snakes' heads of polished ebony that formed two arms for her seat. The elaborate ritual that was to culminate in her death was begun. She recalled Adrian, shut up in his study, bent over his desk, concentrating on her, sending out his strong will to aid her own. Strengthened, steadied, she then deliberately thrust aside this mental image and gave her whole attention to Stephen and his profane and terrifying preparations.

Mark's sin-eater—Mark himself now, save for the thin veil of flesh that masked his hell-born vicious soul. It was Stephen's straight strong body there, kneeling at the altar. It was his dear hands, his dark head, his face and eyes and lips. Oh! it was everything—and it was nothing. The mad cruel smile, the eyes' wild glare, the towering merciless pride that blazed behind this fleshly screen were Mark's alone.

Mark's sin-eater. And how deep was every sin of the dead printed upon this face and body of Stephen Lynn! The voice that rang in deep imperious rhythm was altogether Mark's. Stephen's had been notably clear, eager, flexible, with a trick of rising inflection that she adored.

Ah! This was Mark! That he moved and spoke in Stephen's guise made him more awfully Mark Zennor. Not a glimpse of the real Stephen. Not a spark of his own ego burned in the temple of his body; its altar light was quenched and Mark's dark soul was in possession.

Rosaina's courage wavered. Suppose Adrian was wrong? Suppose Stephen could not, after all, return to his habitation of the flesh for the promised moment? Suppose she failed to recognize the moment if it came? What had Adrian said?

"Stephen will come. He *must* come. Zennor may not offer sacrifice without first allowing Stephen to return momentarily to his own body once more. Beyond all question you will see him again in the flesh."

Fear drove hope away, rode her leaping thoughts.

"He is not here—the man I love is not here. This is a devil, a monster, it is Mark. He has tricked Stephen, destroyed him, thrust him down to hell—his eyes—Stephen's kind gentle eyes—that cat, how his eyes were held by Mark's! . . . Stephen's too, he must obey, torture himself, he is a slave—a slave like that animal! Stephen! But there *is* no Stephen—he has no body, no soul, he doesn't exist! Stephen!"

But love still struggled to believe.

"I must wait. One moment there will be, one brief moment! I shall meet him face to face in the living flesh. My dear! My beloved! And I will hold him fast—fast for ever. No one shall take him from me. He will come and I will hold him fast—fast—"

And now the chapel lights grew dim. The suspended dazzling globe of metal dulled to a pale moonglow. Black candles, tall watchful guardians about the altar-stone, bowed trembling heads of flame, bowed down to their sockets, wavered—died. Only the reredos still blazed, its restless secret fires more brilliant, more incandescent as globe and candles failed.

Stephen turned from the altar, advanced with stately purposeful deliberation, down the five steps, across the chapel floor. Now he stood before Rosaina and in his brilliant eyes she saw Mark's demon enthroned, triumphant.

"Come!" he commanded. "I am ready. You are chosen to share this Hour with me."

She felt his fingers close upon her own; their heat burned her, their cruel strength appalled. This was Mark, all Mark indeed. How well she knew that fierce hold, how her nerves shrank at its familiar possessiveness!

He led her to a thin, blood-red crescent of moon that gleamed in its first quarter on the marble floor. Vast eagles' wings outstretched in fiery lines behind the wicked knife-edge of the moon.

"Stand here."

Obediently she placed her feet upon the sign. She felt its poignant blade's sharp agony. The High Priest, hands of iron on her shoulders, faced her with rapt cruel face down-bent.

"Receive her, oh Prince and Ruler of the Air! This is the victim appointed to fulfil my Destiny. Before Time began I chose her from all the worlds that are. Her blood shall seal my vow."

She felt the beat of great wings; the air about her vibrated and fanned her coldly on the

cheek, cold as the breath from mountain heights, cold to the heart it struck—but the High Priest's face of triumph chilled her very soul.

He led her to the east, where a half-moon showed—a fountain of living water rising beside it. Here again he dedicated her, calling on all the waters of the earth to witness his power.

By the three-quarter moon dark earth was strewn, and, standing here, she knew the smothering darkness of the grave. Only the unrelenting hand that guided her, the deep voice that pealed in trumpet-call, summoned her again from what seemed her tomb.

And now he set her feet upon the last ominous moon in whose full orb moved that potent deadly cloud—soul of all that is—ageless — indestructible — accursed.

A brazier of fire stood close by. The High Priest drew a tiny phial from the folds of his robe, shook its powdered contents on the red coals. Flame leaped in a twisting clear blue pillar to the roof, spread across it, streamed down the walls again.

The High Priest's voice rolled in thrilling music above the elements' fierce roar:

"Rulers of Fire—above the earth, within the earth, about the earth!

Michael! Samael! Anael! Hear me now!

The appointed Hour is come! The Victim is prepared!

Receive my Sacrifice! Receive my Sacrifice! Receive my Sacrifice!"

As the third loud cry rang echoing round the chapel's flaming walls, one single spear of glittering white fire thrust upward from the cradle of its being—from the deadly ovoid cloud within the full red moon. The priest's hand closed swiftly about the fire-spear, bent it to brush Rosaina's forehead, released it with a muttered word. Instantly the spear vanished and all the fiery walls and roof grew dark once more.

Down to his knees sank the High Priest. His lips touched the red moon's rim. Three times he did obeisance, three times he murmured words of power. Then he rose and faced the victim.

Rosaina, at touch of the shining spear, felt deadly mortal chill invade her body—a sense of doom paralyzed every faculty.

It was too late to strugle, too late to fight! Stephen was lost! And she must die! She must let go—let go—let go. . . .

She stood watching the High Priest as he moved from her, up the five steps, up to the altar. He reached it, turned to face

her, lifted his arms until his black silken cloak stretched like wings on either side of a scarlet sheath-like robe. Higher leaped the hellish lights behind the reredos. Before its strong pulsating evil, Stephen loomed dark and tall and terrible. He waited for her. He summoned her. She must obey—obey him.

From the caves of darkness that lined the walls between its broad squat pillars, shadows thrust and crowded, worshippers from hell, incorporeal, soundless, shapeless, fluid as water, bodiless as smoke, yet, beyond all words, instinct with power.

The High Priest's congregation was assembled. Rosaina the Victim was summoned. Cold and darkness below, above, on every side. She moved to the altar like driftwood borne on the ocean tide.

Now she was at the altar steps. Each one's ascent set her a world's width farther off from Stephen. Now she stood in the balefire glow of the altarscreen. The High Priest's hands lifted her, laid her on the altar-stone.

At last she saw the figures on the gleaming quivering reredos, saw herself in the bound victim there, saw Stephen in the High Priest who stood beside the sacrificial stone. And behind the veils of the Four about the altar, she recognized the lewd companions of her dream.

A swift pang of longing tore her for Adrian's help. How sure he had been! How utterly she had believed that Stephen—Stephen himself—would return if only for an instant. Now, turning to the wickedly intent face bent over her she saw Mark, and Mark alone.

Stephen was lost—for ever lost. And she must die and go out in the darkness too.

Thin biting cords were bound about her. A knife-blade winked and flashed. Now indeed the end was come. Her eyes stared up into the face bent over hers.

Sudden rending pain stung her failing senses. A veil seemed snatched from before her eyes. Her heart's slow beat quickened to furious pulsing life. Nerve and muscle strained to break the bonds that held her.

"Stephen! Stephen! Stephen!"

Her voice rang through the gloom. The black smooth walls seemed to quiver in response. All the hurtling swarming shadows jostled closer.

"Stephen! Stephen!"

Again the dark walls trembled. Closer pressed the demon shadows.

"Stephen! Come to me! Come to me!"

The High Priest's face bent lower. Dark eyes looked into her own. A faint urgent whisper reached her ears.

*"I have come . . . from hell*

*. . . to you. Hold me! Save me!"*

"Stephen!" she cried again. "Ah, this is you indeed! Your eyes that look at me. Stephen! I will hold you. I will save you. Keep your eyes on mine. I will never, never let you go!"

And now she died a thousand deaths. Delusion hurled her from world to world through awful space. Fire burned her flesh from her charred bones. Water drowned her beneath dark mountainous waves. Heavy earth buried her in earthquake shocks. But in flame and rushing water, under the earth or above it in the illimitable aching kingdoms of the air, she saw one thing clearly. She saw the face of Stephen Lynn. Nothing—nothing else.

Fighting, struggling, holding the gates of her will fast locked against Mark's vicious power, she felt a hand in hers. It was Adrian's strong clasp. Adrian's voice spoke across the roar of fire and tumult of water, of crashing rocks and howling winds.

"The Hour is about to strike. Hold fast, hold fast!"

Stephen's face grew clearer. Its look altered. He was smiling down at her. She could feel his warmth breath. His strong gentle hands released her from her bonds. His voice spoke, assuring her of safety. His arms enfolded her as she sank, faint with rapture . . . the world about her fading. . . .

* * *

"BUT Adrian! You did come to me!" she protested. "I saw you, heard you, felt your hand in mine."

"Probably. All of me that really *is* me. But my body didn't move from this room, this table, this chair you see before you."

Rosaina looked round the room, then turned to Stephen once more.

He put out a hand to touch her own.

"Yes! Still here, darling."

"I can't—I can't believe it. The three of us together at last—safe—happy—free! Free!"

"And Mark—" she shuddered. "Tell me, Adrian, I want to know before we forget him—utterly. What happened—what does our freedom mean—to *him?*"

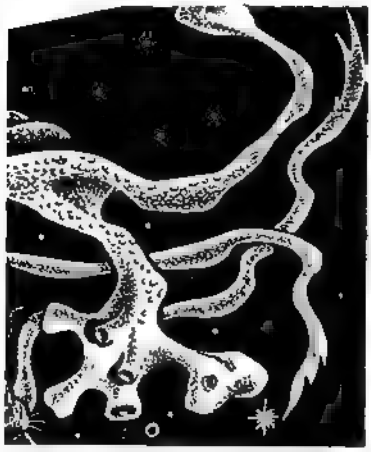
Sant put out a quick warning hand. His answer came muffled, almost a whisper:

"Forget, forget, Rosaina! His dark soul is in bondage. It is not safe, even in thought, to follow him now."

Stephen's arms drew her to him. His eyes adored her.

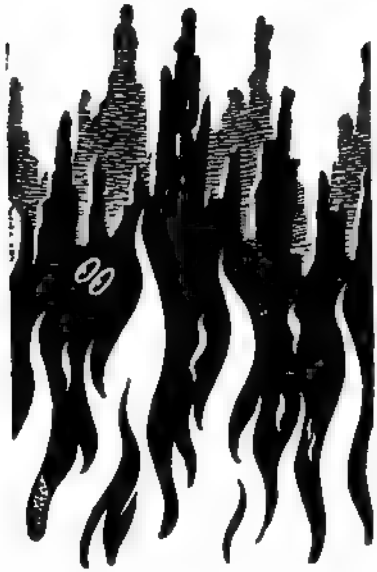
"Rose, golden Rose! Remember only that we are happy—free—at last."

# Beware, of Vampire Women



By PATRICIA BURGESS

YOU must not wanton with each casual maiden,
Or the succubi may clasp you very soon . . .
Your heart is prodigal when roaming lightly—
Too easily distracted by the moon.
For when a siren seated by the wayside
May dazzle with an eloquent allure,
And melts your heart with diabolic beauty:
Such perilous adventure leaves no cure.



So cease your playing with the lotus damsels,
One never knows a demon in disguise;
Her voice is low and purring like a kitten;
Erotic, wax and wane her jacinth eyes.
Beware, you fickle cavalier of fortune;
You may be lost forever in an hour.
For a creature subtly warm, perversely human,
May bleed your soul . . . silk-smiling to devour.

# The GREEN HUNTSMAN

They were sure there was something green in the wood—green and very, very evil.

*BY*

***DOROTHEA GIBBONS***

**Heading by Virgil Finlay**

THE Manor house of Scarthon an autumn morning of drifting leaves and mist, was an old house which seemed to shrug its shoulders against the biting wind blowing up from the saltings and the sea and the scarlet creeper covering its walls was shedding fast and would soon leave the walls naked.

A man inside the house who had been looking out of a window, turned back from it towards the room.

"You've asked my advice, sir, and I think you have no option but to let her come."

Richard Ayreton, sitting over the fire, stirred a little.

"She shall come, I've already written," he said, but his voice was uneasy, "but—you know the autumn's not the time."

The other had a wary look, as if something had come unbidden to his mind and that the thought of it didn't please him. He chose his words carefully before answering.

"No one's likely to believe this business or anyone here likely to tell her anything about it. People don't speak of it in these parts."

Ayreton banged his hands down onto his knees. "I find it extraordinary that I should believe in it myself," he said.

"My family have, of course, but I've always reckoned myself too hard-headed."

Shrilly beside him the telephone rang and he answered it. "A telegram? Yes, I've got it, thank you."

As he hung up the receiver he looked across at Nick Borrodale. "It's sooner than we thought. Tomorrow she'll be coming and the child of course."

Nick spoke cheerfully. "It'll be good for you, sir," he said, "since you've been ill it's lonely here and I can't be with you much because of the increasing work on the farm. Besides I'm only your agent, and you say you like this niece of yours." He lit a cigarette as he turned to go. "Try not to worry, sir," he said, "I'll do all I can to see—to take care of everything."

Francesca Newtownly, widowed some years after the war, had now found herself without a home, and had turned to the one relation she had, to give her houseroom until such time as she could find the kind of small place she could afford. Her son, now seven years old, would go to boarding school after Christmas.

WHEN Nick met her at the station the next day, he found she was small and young and that her son was like her in face. "You'll both do your uncle good," said Nick, "he's not very fit now and can't get around for the time being."

Francesca said, "It's so kind of him to have us. I've known Scarth since I was a child and loved it, but I've always been to it in the spring."

And, for some reason Nick was silent as they drove through the darkening lanes. He seemed to have a sudden sharpening of the dull fear he had had with him ever since he knew Francesca and the boy were to come. The trees were thick round them when they reached the drive and he felt a wish to look to left and right.

No, you fool, he told himself, it's not here anyway, not here but in the wood; and then, because he was not at ease, he spoke of the weather and the lately gathered harvest and realized he was being trite and very uninteresting, indeed.

When they reached the house, the woods crept away from it to the right and the south windows looked away towards the marshland. In the warm hall with the welcome of Richard Ayreton, the housekeeper and the dogs, Nick forgot his anxiety, and it was only on his drive home that he remembered, to the exclusion of Francesca's gray eyes and gentle voice.

To get to his house he had to drive along a part of road which cut through the woods.

Nick was a strong, young man who had been through the war at sea. He was tall and powerful and would have tackled another in fair fight most joyfully, but there was something on his mind which was a far worse thing than flesh and blood. The trees bent towards the road, and though there was a moon it was hidden in cloud. It was where the road crossed through the wood, yes, that was where—God! said Nick, and believed he spoke aloud. He felt the sweat pricking on his forehead, and as the car went on his eyes were strained first on one side of the road and then on the other. There was a menace in each shifting branch, each leaf that fell withered to the ground.

But beyond that, there was nothing, nothing at all.

THE next morning Nick went to Scarth to get the check for the farm-hands' wages and in the drive before the house he found Francesca and young Paul throwing sticks for Sebastian, a half-bred spaniel who seemed to have attached himself to them. Francesca called to Nick and her eyes were bright and she had tied up her head in a brightly colored scarf. "Paul's to start school in the village next week," she said, "so till then we're just enjoying ourselves."

Paul ran up to Nick, followed by Sebastian, and Nick's hand fell gently on the rough head of

the dog, while the boy caught hold of his arm.

Sebastian was a good judge of men. He had had a master once who was no good to dogs. But Nick he liked and trusted and Paul seemed to do the same.

"Sebastian can run very fast, he likes to jump as high as he can. He's a kind dog, he isn't rough. I like him."

But Paul's chatter went unheeded, for Nick was looking at Francesca and he knew there was joy in seeing her but that the unease in his mind took the first place. Could he tell her not to go—where it was best she shouldn't go, she and the boy? Why, Sebastian never went there; he had had him with him one afternoon, and the dog had refused to come through that bit of the wood. That was before—well, before I knew, said Nick to himself. Yet how could he spoil the sunny autumn day with a tale which would frighten her, if she didn't think him mad? But she mustn't walk there, simply mustn't go. What could he tell her and, then—"We're felling trees," he said with some truth, but the felling was far from the place he meant, "it's as well not to walk in the woods here just now."

Three pairs of eyes were looking at him, including those of Sebastian. The autumn day fell about them, clear and cold and there was the stillness in it of the turn of the year, a birdless silence when only the robin sings or a few starlings chatter on the housetops. There was a robin about today and he called shrilly as he flew from one tree to the other, but there were no other sounds.

"If the men are felling trees, they are very quiet," said Francesca. She looked puzzled and Nick saw with horror that some of his unspoken anxiety might be affecting her.

"They're having a break for a cup of tea, I expect," he said stoutly. "They've got a hut in the woods where they eat."

"Shall we hear the trees falling very often?" Francesca asked. "I never like it, trees are so much older than we are, they've seen so much."

"They're only felling small trees here," said Nick and almost felt his color rising as he lied to her trusting eyes.

I did it in a good cause, he told himself savagely, when he had left Francesca and Paul and loathed himself for having lied. But they must never go near that part of the woods, never.

A WEEK went by and then came a tearing wind from the sea that ripped off the leaves like bits of paper, piling them in deep heaps. It stayed dull all day and when Nick came back

to his house during the afternoon he found there a message from Francesca saying that Paul was missing and had been for some hours.

Nick got to Scarth to find Richard Ayreton and Francesca extremely anxious. The boy's mother put into his mind the fear he had already. "I think he's gone into the woods in spite of what you told us," she said breathlessly. "I've been there calling him but there's no sound. There are no men felling trees either, there never were any, I'm certain. I've only come back from looking for Paul to see if you'd come."

"I'll go back with you," Nick said swiftly and she caught at his hand.

"I'm so afraid, so dreadfully afraid!"

"Where's Sebastian?" he asked quickly. "That dog would find anyone anywhere and he loves that boy!"

"That's one of the worst things," Francesca answered, "Sebastian's missing, too."

"He'd never go to the wood," cried Nick, "that is, unless—he was with Paul."

"If he is, let's pray he's looking after him," she said, and they started together to run.

"And what's all this terror, this mystery about the wood?" asked Francesca breathlessly. "Oh, Nick, you must tell me! Three grown-up people in a panic because a small boy has gone for a walk with a dog, or so we think—"

"No harm will come to Paul," said Nick, "he's probably not here in the woods at all, and if so, well, what's a wood anyway? No worse than any other place."

But she gave a sob and shook her head. The wind was rising to still greater strength as if with the waning day it was renewing itself. In the woods there was such a noise and a rushing in the trees that they could hardly hear each other speak. And before long it would be dark which was in itself terrifying when a child was lost. Francesca was insistent that she had repeatedly told Paul he was not to go into the woods because of the tree felling and as a rule he was an obedient child and this made the whole thing more strange.

And now, above the noise of the trees and the wind Francesca said, "There are things you've been hiding, Nick, things about the woods." For a moment the wind seemed to bend her down but as Nick pulled her on she spoke again. "Let's call him," she said, "all the time, then wait for a little and see whether he answers. And then we can call Sebastian. I don't believe that dog would leave Paul if he's with him, but if we call he may come."

A useless business, as Nick very well knew. The noise in the woods was too great for any other sound to be heard. Could they hear a shrill boy's voice against this massive sound of wind and trees? Nick caught Francesca's hand in his and smiled at her though he felt his face would crack.

They walked on silently.

In the deepening darkness she met his eyes with a still desolation which turned his heart. "I know, I think, but I'll still call. Paul, answer me, if you hear me, answer."

Once again they were silent, though the trees and the wind were not, and as they hurried on the brambles and the dying bracken hampered them, hanging round their ankles viciously as if to stop their going.

SHE told him something then. "I went to the wood once alone," she said, "I wanted to see whether the men were really felling trees, because I didn't believe they were, and when I was close here somewhere, though its hard to tell exactly, I found a place where there was something green. I thought it might be a tree which hadn't turned its leaves, but it wasn't that—"

Nick felt a coldness inside him, but he answered her stoutly. "Don't try and talk," he said. "We've enough to do to get along."

"Don't put me off," Francesca answered him, "there's something in these woods, I tell you, green and watching."

"What else did you see?" Nick asked her.

"Nothing," she answered, catching her breath, "just nothing, it was just green and then it was just like the rest of the woods, gold and brown—"

They called Paul again and again but there was nothing.

Francesca started to cry. "What shall we do, Nick, what shall we do?"

"Go back and get all the men off the place and search the place with torches," he said grimly. "I'll have my car in the road and turn on the headlights. We'll find him."

They were passing now near the place where they shouldn't be, the place from which he had wanted to keep Francesca and Paul and where Sebastian the dog wouldn't go. But it was empty, quite clear of anything but the trees bent forward like human shapes groaning in the wind, just russet and brown and dull with autumn and the oncoming darkness.

THEY were getting back to the house now and could see its shape glimmering with lights, and then as they ran they heard

it, Paul's voice calling, "Mummy! I'm here—" and Sebastian's short barks of welcome.

Paul met them near the steps with Richard Ayreton beside him who spoke to him sternly. "You've worried your mother to death, you'd better apologize to her and to Mr. Borrodale, they've been ages hunting for you!"

Paul hung his head, and then looked up to his mother. "I did go to the woods," he said unwillingly. "I was tired of being told not to, and I made Sebastian come."

"Sebastian never goes into the woods," said Nick quickly.

"I know," said Paul shifting from one foot to another, and he rubbed his dirty hands across his face, "but he had to this time, I made him, he wouldn't leave me you see, but he tried to make me come back and he ran round and round me and pulled at my raincoat. But I went on and on and he came, too, but he lagged behind and he wouldn't run on ahead after rabbits like he usually does. We got lost pretty soon," he ended lamely.

Francesca had recovered from her fright and in the light from the hall door she took her son's shoulders. "You disobeyed me, Paul, you had no right to go; what happened in the woods after you got lost?"

"I'm sorry I worried you, Mum," said Paul and suddenly started to cry which was unlike the boy.

"Come into the warm," said Richard and then Paul told them, while Sebastian watched him as if he knew each word he was saying.

"It was down there," Paul said and pointed to the windows, "in the woods beyond the road, that's where Sebastian hated it so, there was—something green in there and I wanted to see it

closer. We were pretty lost then and I didn't know the road was so near." He stopped twisting his hands together.

"Go on," said his mother.

"I wanted to see it closer, this green thing, you know," said

Paul whispering, "then I did see —well, what it was—" Sebastian pushed against him and with his hand on the dog's head, Paul went on. "It was a man on a horse," said Paul and his voice was uncertain, "but it was funny, he was all green and the horse too, and his face and eyes were green as well and he was watching me. Sebastian had been whining a lot and then he started barking and he caught hold of my coat as if he wanted to drag me away. But—I couldn't go. Then the man on the horse started to come towards me very slowly, he was sort of smiling, but Sebastian hated him, and he rushed at him and he—bit at the horse, but it didn't move. Sebastian got frantic and he just pulled me down on the ground and that stopped me looking at the man's eyes, they were horrid," Paul swallowed then went on. "When I looked up again all the green had gone and there was nothing there but the trees and Sebastian, and—we came home."

THAT night Nick stayed late with Francesca and Richard Ayreton, and they talked of this odd thing, this man and the horse, the story of which had been known in the Ayreton family for generations.

"To think we've all believed it, you, Nick, and I myself," said Ayreton, pulling at his pipe. "This fellow," and he bent his hand to the sleeping Sebastian, "this fellow undoubtedly saved Paul from ill. In the autumn you see, that's when it happens; we've all seen—this greenness and hated it. Maybe it took the boy and the dog to really see it properly, and to—get rid of it."

"You think it's gone?" asked Francesca and Nick's hand had slid over hers. Richard Ayreton nodded and bent forward and put another log on the fire, but the wind puffed smoke back into his face.

"Chimney needs sweeping," he muttered, then he looked up and smiled. "Yes," he said gently, "the thing's gone, I'm certain. Oh, the story? Well, Nick here knows it, but not you, Francesca. Many hundreds of years ago it's said that a man of very evil ways hunted these woods on a devil of a horse as evil as himself. There's an old wives tale in the family that when another beast on four legs shall oust him to save a man, then shall he go."

And at their feet Sebastian yelped in his sleep and slept again as if in his dreams he had seen the flicker of the Green Huntsman as he rode the woods for the last time.

# THE TREE OF LIFE

***BY PAUL ERNST***

**Nothing can be colder than a corpse—nothing. . . .**

IT WAS cold. God, it was cold! Outside the cabin a blanket of February snow showed leaden white under the heavy mid-afternoon clouds. A keening wind growled through the bare-limbed trees. It rattled the dry boughs like the fingers of skeletons; and stole between the slats of the crude window to twitch at the shroud of the thing beneath.

It was from that sheeted, stark figure on the long bench that the greatest cold seemed to emanate. Nothing can be colder that a corpse. Nothing! A corpse seems to radiate a deathly chill that numbs the heart of whoever is near it.

Because of the shrouded body more than because of the actual temperature, I was chilled to the bone in spite of my inches of heavy clothing. I got to my feet and walked up and down the one room of the cabin, averting my eyes from the figure on the bench.

Then, in an effort to conquer fear with familiarity, I crossed the room and lifted the shroud from the hatchet face beneath.

An old woman, looking far older than her years because of her lifetime of toil and disappointments! The hair was scant and yellow-gray. The eyes, open and staring, were like gray stones. The nose seemed to have projected even farther in death than in life. It jutted out like the point of a wedge. There was nothing lovely in this pilgrim, set out for the farther shore. There was nothing reposeful here.

It was Mrs. Whilom, wife of Ab Whilom, our nearest farm neighbor. The old couple had been swindled out of their modest Ohio farm five years before. In their old age they had

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been forced to come to upper Michigan, bare-handed, to wrest a living from the unfamiliar soil. And now—this!

That noon my father and I had hitched up for the twelve-mile drive over laborious roads to town. (This was before the day of teeming autos and cement highways.) In front of the Whilom cabin my father had pulled up the horses and stopped.

Standing before us was Ab—a spare, gnarled man in whom age had curdled like milk in a thunderstorm.

"Jest a minute," he called, coming to the side of the wagon. "I need help."

"Anything we can do—" my father began amiably. He stopped at the look in Ab's eyes.

"My old woman's jest died," he said. The words were as perfunctory as though he had just announced that his hogs had cholera. But his eyes spoke for him. They were dazed, hollowed out with sense of loss.

"Somebody'd ought to stay with her while I go to town for the undertaker," continued Ab. "She couldn't never bide being alone. I'd hate to leave her alone now."

My father turned to me, doubtfully, speculatively.

"Think you can keep her company, son?"

My look must have showed how repulsive I found the idea of a lonely vigil in the squalid cabin with a dead woman, for he hastened on.

"Never mind. I'll do it. You're pretty young . . ."

Now the youth of youth is a sore point. His reminding me of my sixteen years was sufficient to make me insist on staying there while he drove Ab on into town.

So here I was, shivering in the mean little hut beside the dead Mrs. Whilom, blue with a cold that did not come entirely from the winter wind but that emanated straight from the shrouded thing on the bench under the window.

I REPLACED the sheet over the hawk features, and sat down before the fireplace. That psychic cold that struck through jacket and mackinaw, knee-high boots and heavy socks! I huddled closer to the fire, resolutely turning my eyes to the leaping flames. I did not want to look toward the dead woman.

I wondered if the body, in life, housed a deathless spirit, as most people claim it does. I wondered where this woman's spirit was. I fancied I knew what other spirit it was at the moment.

Just before the land deal that had cheated the Whiloms out of their little farm, Ab's daughter had died. The daughter was an unfortunate creature, born blind

and dull-witted and ugly. Her whole life had been filled by Mrs. Whilom. And the old lady, to hear Ab tell it, had concentrated all her frustrated hopes and ambitions in a ferocious maternal flame of love for her unfortunate child.

The two had talked without words, Ab had once said. The girl's soul, he said, was twisted around the mother's like a creeper around a tree.

Now was the daughter rejoined in death by the only person that had ever meant anything to her—the only light that had shone in her warped, blind world — her mother? Was the daughter's spirit hovering somewhere near, come to escort the spirit of her beloved parent?

I thought of these things as I huddled miserably over a fire that could not warm me, and prayed the time would not be too long in passing till my father and Ab got back with the undertaker.

I TURNED to the wood-box, which was full to overflowing, and dumped a big armful of split branches into the fire. This awful cold!

The fire roared higher as I fed it more wood. In an effort to counteract that chilling cold I built a blaze that threatened the safety of the cabin.

The first keen edge of my formless terror gradually wore off, as all keen edges do in time. The psychic chill was less numbing. Or, possibly, it was more numbing. I don't know. Perhaps my fear was now so great that my nerves refused to twitch to its stimulus any more. At any rate, calm, of a sort, came over me. And with this unnatural, stunned calm there came a relief from the coldness.

In spite of the open window, covered only by the few meager slats, in spite of the low temperature outside, I began to feel suffocated. I was dressed to be comfortable at zero. It must have been nearly 60 now in the low, small room.

I took off my mackinaw and loosened my collar. Then, as my feet felt the heat, my boots began to bother me. They were new—and stiff as only new knee-high boots can be. I took them off, too, and padded about in my heavy socks. I opened the door for a foot or so and propped it with a piece of firewood.

Trying to make my mind a blank, I sat down, a good way from the scorching fire. Another two hours would be needed before the trip to town and back could be concluded. Two hours. Two centuries!

I sat there, keeping my eyes on the partly opened door so that I would not see the way the drafts twitched like ghostly fin-

gers at the edge of the shroud.

There was a faint scratching on the bare-swept step outside. A small, tapered head, in which were set two beady eyes, was poked inquisitively around the edge of the door. A wood-rat. And an astonishingly bold one! Driven past fear, no doubt, by the attraction of the warmth and the smell of food in the cupboard.

Cautiously, with many a spasmodic retreat, it came into the cabin. It kept its hard little eyes warily on me. I stayed motionless, glad of any distraction.

After perhaps five minutes of maneuvering, it reached the center of the room and crouched, staring impudently up at me. I reached slowly down beside me for one of my boots. Slowly—

The wood-rat jerked toward the door, but stopped as my descending hand was stayed. It came back. And now my fingers were around the boot-top.

My hand snapped back and up. The rat raced for the door, but a foot away from it the flung boot chanced to catch it squarely. It kicked a little, and lay still, with a fleck of red dabbling its spiky, repulsive whiskers.

I started up to throw the dead rat out of the cabin, when another scratching sound on the step outside came to my ears.

It was a second wood-rat. And this one was either entirely fearless or lost to caution in its discovery of its fellow's fate.

Without even a glance at me, it streaked from the door to the furry body lying beside my boot. It sniffed around the dead rat with inquisitive nose, and stared at it with beady eyes. Then, almost before I could follow its movements, it had streaked for the door again, and was gone.

Almost at once it was back again. And in its mouth was a green leaf, about the size and shape of an oak leaf.

A green leaf! Green! In the middle of February in a region where winter is unrelenting and iron-bound!

My face must have been a mask of stupidity as I stared at that leaf. Where in the name of all that was miraculous could the rodent have found it? There were no green trees in the countryside at that time of year! I knew there were none. Yet—here was this leaf!

THE rat was less quick this time, less bold. It crept slowly toward the stiffening body of its mate. As it advanced it kept its glittering little eyes directed—not toward me, curiously enough, but toward the corpse.

There followed a most astounding spectacle.

The rat began to scurry aimlessly around the room as though something were chasing it. Care-

fully holding the amazing leaf clear of the floor, it dodged wildly from one wall to the other, always keeping its eyes fixed on thin air in front of it. I was as completely disregarded as though I had not been there.

Toward the improvised bier the rat scurried, only to double spasmodically away from it and run under my very chair. Had the thing gone mad? I began to fumble for my other boot, fear of a bite overcoming my curiosity to see the outcome of this inexplicable play.

The rat approached its dead mate again, keeping its eyes on a spot on the wall over the body —as if there were something there that was invisible to my eyes.

With a quick move it placed the green leaf squarely on the little stark body. And behold—a miracle!

The rat that was dead was no longer dead! Under my very gaze it quivered and came to life. The legs jerked once or twice. The body twitched. The creature rose, limping and stiff, and followed its mate out the door!

My mind whirled in a blind chaos. That impossible green leaf—its contact with the dead rat—the resurrection of the little pest!

As had everyone else who lived in that part of the state, I had heard tales of a fabulous Tree of Life. Somewhere in the region there was said to be a tree that could raise the dead at a mere touch. The myth had been handed down to the old-timers by the Indians. My father had heard the yarn from his father, and had told it to me when I was younger and begged for a fairy-story.

It was a myth. Of course it was a myth! There could be no truth in such a thing! But—that wood-rat had surely been dead. And now it was alive!

I stared at the leaf, still lying on the floor. Like an oak leaf, it was, but of a softer texture and a lighter green. A leaf from the Tree—

My gaze went, fascinated, from the leaf to the body under the window.

A dead rat had come to life. Why could not a dead human being? Both were flesh. Both were made of the same stuff. And here, to my hand was this incredible green leaf.

I left my chair and picked it up. It seemed to curl about my fingers with a life of its own. It was soft as the softest silk, and warm—like no other leaf I'd ever touched. The feel of it went through me like wine. I seemed to expand, to grow larger than my own self.

Clutching the leaf, I started toward the corpse. As I went the numbing chill that had paralyzed

me before, laid hold of me again. And suddenly, as though the touch of the leaf had given my eyes new power, I thought I saw something wavering protectively over the dead body. I say "thought" because by now it was early dusk, and the misty shape I seemed to see was so intermingled with the gathering shadows that I could not be sure. Also, when I blinked my eyes to test their veracity, the vision disappeared.

I lifted up the shroud, and started to touch the leaf to the dead woman's face—

Icy fingers seemed to catch at my wrist! My hand was torn away!

"Will!"

It was like a shower of ice-cold water, that whip-like crack of my name sounding behind me. I gasped with the suddenness of it, combined as it was with the sheer terror that had crept through me at the fancied touch of those unseen fingers.

My hand opened convulsively. As though caught up by some invisible force, the leaf whirled out the window and was gone.

"Has anything happened to upset you?" asked my father.

"No," I mumbled. "No. Nothing at all has happened."

"I thought I saw something blow out of the window," he persisted. I made no answer.

Ab, meanwhile, was taking a last look at the woman who had helped and cared for him for so long.

"She's happier now, I reckon," he muttered. "She's with Patty, prob'ly, with our poor blind daughter . . ."

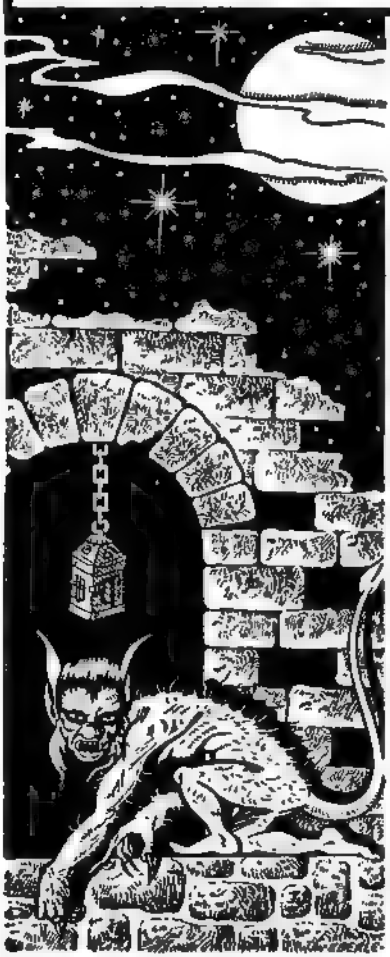
I NEVER told them what had happened in that cabin. A kid of sixteen doesn't tell such things. He's too sure he'll be laughed at. It's only now, when I am well along in years, that I dare to relate the affair and speculate about it.

Was the rat really dead? Possibly not; I am in no position to prove it. Did I merely imagine that wavering thing by the corpse, and the touch of those cold fingers? Perhaps; one's imagination is apt to work overtime during such a vigil. Could the spirit of the dead daughter have really been in that room, and did it first chase the rat and then clutch at my wrist in an effort to keep the mother from being resurrected? It sounds unbelievable.

The only fact that I can reiterate is that the leaf—in the midst of winter—was green. I saw it, held it in my hand. What would have happened had I touched it to the corpse? I don't know, of course, but I think . . . I think . . .

# GUARDIAN

## by W. J. Suprenant



As far as the police could see they were up against the impossible.

"BUT this is unthinkable!" Lydia Senshaw cried, thumping one small fist against the young police lieutenant's desk. "I am truly sorry to know that Mr. Martel died so dreadfully, but the idea that *I* might have had something to do with it—!"

Lieutenant Moss sighed. "Miss Senshaw," he said quietly, disavowing any such implication with one calming gesture, "no one has accused you of anything. No one wants to accuse you. What we are trying to do is to discover by what means Mr. Martel met his death."

"Don't!" Lydia said, and shuddered. "Don't go into detail again, I beg of you. I can only repeat what I told you earlier this afternoon: I went to the studio to get some pictures I'd mailed in to be developed. Mr. Martel said they'd be ready today. There was no one else in the studio when I arrived. I waited perhaps five minutes before I rang the bell Mr. Martel kept on the display table. He was a little deaf, you see, and when

Heading by Joseph Eberle

he did not come out, I went into the back and rapped on the darkroom door."

"Had you done that before?"

"Once or twice. I knew him rather well, you see. I had no reason to feel that I was being—well, presumptuous."

"I see. Would you mind saying just how well you did know him?"

"Oh!" Lydia gasped, her heart-shaped little face turning rosy beneath its tan. "Are you being deliberately offensive, Lieutenant? Mr. Martel was an old man, a respectable old man. And I—"

Again the lieutenant raised one apologetic hand. "I meant no offense, Miss. We're only trying to learn what we can. You were telling about knocking on the darkroom door; there was no response of any kind?"

Lydia hesitated. Her velvet black eyes rested thoughtfully upon a fly drowsing in one sunny corner of the office, but she was not seeing the fly. She was remembering the darkroom door and the small, dreadful sound that had escaped from behind it. And one thing more—

"There was a faint sound," she said finally. "It was more like a chuckle of laughter than anything else, but of course that is not possible. It couldn't have been a laugh, could it?" For a moment, the dark eyes rested upon the lieutenant's face, in a look almost of pleading. "And then the door swung open; suddenly, without sound. I felt a rush of hot air, almost like a blast of heat from a furnace, really. And I was afraid. I don't know why. Then I saw the hand lying on the darkroom floor and I—I ran outside and told the janitor. He called the police. And that is every bit I can tell you."

LIEUTENANT MOSS studied the distressed little face. He felt that she had told the truth. But if it was the truth, all of it, then he was in for a very bad time indeed.

Albert Martel had not been quite dead when the police found him lying on the floor of his darkroom. He was dead before the m.e. had given his opinion that the man could not have lived ten minutes with the wounds he had received. The room had been in total darkness just as Miss Senshaw had left it. There was no exit except the door leading into the studio. From the studio itself there were two exits: the door leading into the hallway where a cleaning woman had been at work throughout the entire period between the time Miss Senshaw had entered the studio and the time the police arrived—and the cleaning woman had seen no one

but the girl—and a fire escape which had also been under close observation the entire time.

A workman had been busy repairing a damaged section of masonry where the fire escape joined the building at the top. He had not, however, been so busy that he would not have known whether anyone had gone up or down. The workman's story was verified by two boys who had spent the time playing marbles at the foot of the fire escape. Turn as he would, Moss could place no suspect at the scene of the crime within the critical period. No one, that is, but Lydia Senshaw. And there the lieutenant came up against the impossible. Albert Martel was a gutted red ruin. The walls, the floor, even the ceiling of the darkroom were spattered with his blood. It was not possible that the murderer could have escaped without a stain, yet here was Miss Senshaw, just as they had found her, attired in immaculate white: hat, dress, purse, shoes; even her small hands were covered by crisp white gloves of net. And the only touch of red about her was the glowing velvet of her mouth. Besides, the lieutenant thought —not without some relief—the girl was the last thing in the vicious killer type that one could well expect.

"We appreciate what you have been able to tell us," Lieutenant Moss said, then, "If you should remember anything else, however inconsequential, get in touch with me, won't you?"

"Of course," Miss Senshaw said, smiling rather wanly. She opened the door, hesitated, and turned once more to the lieutenant. "The pictures," she said, "if you find them, I can have them, can't I?" Again the rosy flush spread beneath the tanned cheeks. "They are snapshots my fiancé and I took while on vacation. I *would* like to have them."

"No harm in that, if they turn up, and I can't think why they shouldn't. If you'll give some identification—"

"Well, there were one or two of myself, I suppose; a few of Arthur, my fiancé, that is. And several of the sea, and the ruins at Point Desmond."

Lieutenant Moss assured her that the pictures were as good as in her hands.

THE pictures were, in fact, lying ready for trimming on the low shelf in the darkroom. Moss recognized Lydia's face on at least seven of the prints. If he had needed any further verification of her story, without question he had found it. He moved among the few men still busy at the scene of the crime, asking an occasional question, expecting no answers but the

ones he received. The murderer, in the opinion of every man there, would be apprehended by nothing short of an act of God. There were one or two half-hearted wisecrack from Detective Gregory, concerning the attitude of Captain Casey when he should learn the impossible facts of the case, but these Moss managed to ignore. The pictures safe in his breast pocket, he went out and down the stairs and forgot about them until some time around ten that night, too late to call Miss Senshaw.

He forgot about them because Captain Casey's attitude had fallen not the least jot short of the previously estimated opinion. At first, he was incredulous. Then, not wishing to appear quite so foolish as he felt, he was furious. They had bungled the job, the lot of them. Did Moss expect him to believe that the homicide had been committed by spooks—or that Martel had inflicted those terrible wounds with his own hands? They'd find some sane, rational explanation before sun-up tomorrow, or there'd be some changes made on the force. . . .

Ten o'clock found Moss, still quivering from the lash of the Captain's tongue, at his desk. Remotely, came the irregular clatter of the teletype, the voices of the night operator and the few men still on duty. The homicide squad had reported nothing new, and Moss considered the coming dawn with nothing short of distaste. His fingers, reaching for a cigarette in his breast pocket, encountered the envelope containing Miss Senshaw's snapshots.

HE PUT them on the desk, determined to put that matter, at least, right. He would call her in the morning. With nothing to do but wait for Gregory's sporadic reports, Moss idly shook the pictures out onto his desk and sifted through them once more. There she was, laughing back over her shoulder at him, or rather, at the taker of the picture. She was climbing a ridge of rock and the bathing suit she wore was charming. So was Miss Senshaw, Moss reflected glumly. Here was one of a rather wind blown young man who showed a glint of laughter in his eyes. Tall, well built, handsome. And here they were together, arms entwined, looking out over the sea; just such a pose as young lovers will assume. Next was a spoiled film. Moss was about to return the pictures to the envelope when his eye was caught and held by a scene that had escaped him in his hurried inspection of the afternoon.

A dismal scene, taken apparently on an overcast day, of what appeared to be the ruin

of a vast building or buildings. Stone, broken masonry, were scattered in desolate abandon over a large radius. In the left side of the picture, far in the background, stood the ruin of an old stone tower. At its base, an entrance showed dim signs of a stairway leading up into darkness. What appeared to be a bundle of old rags lay at one side of the entrance; or was it merely a distortion, a trick of light? Moss sorted through the remaining pictures. Here was one of the tower, taken at close range. There was the stairway, just inside the entrance. And the bundle of old rags. . . . Moss dropped the picture as if it were hot. His hands were trembling, and for the space of a minute he dared not look again at the picture in an effort to verify his eyesight. It was impossible, a freakish distortion . . . but when he looked once more, it had not changed.

The creature was crouched in a menacing position at the foot of the stair, leaning forward upon arms of a disturbing thinness yet corded with tendons that bespoke an awful strength. The hands were long and thin and powerful, ending in nails like talons. Over what could be seen of the creature's flesh lay a black matting of wiry hair. But it was the face that turned Moss' blood to ice; thin, the bone ridged and gleaming palely, it was set in an expression of such malevolent fury and purpose as would cause any beholder to start back involuntarily. The eyes of the creature were feral slits fastened with a dreadful intensity upon the lens of the camera, giving the impression that the eyes looked directly into Moss' own, as indeed he felt that they did.

Moss, at that moment, would have given a month's pay to see a fellow human walk into the office. As it was, the desk 'phone rang with a shattering clamor. Moss grabbed for it with a hand wet with sweat. His thoughts were in such chaos he was compelled to pause for a moment to collect himself; but much sooner than it seemed to him, he answered the summons with only the slightest quaver of voice. It was Gregory. They had found something: the print of a naked foot, outlined in blood, on the *wall* beneath the low shelf running the length of the darkroom. Gregory refused to elaborate. He was having troubles of his own.

"I'll be out there right away," Moss told him.

BUT for a short time, he remained seated at the desk. Reason told him that the bloody footprint was better left alone. He had no desire to verify the sickening suspicion that was insidiously taking possession of his

brain. He was about to rise when out of the corner of his eye he caught a stealthy movement just behind him. It might have been mere shadow; it might have been an exceedingly incautious rat. Moss turned his head a fraction. It was neither. In the all too insufficient light of the room a familiar outline moved just beyond the fringe of his vision. With an oath, Moss sprang from the chair and turned to face whatever horror had crouched behind him. There was nothing to be seen except for a shimmering in the gloom that soon stilled itself, leaving the office untenanted save for Moss and his fright. Steeling himself, he swept the damnable pictures into a desk drawer and turned the key upon them. Then he walked out to where the switchboard operator sat drowsing over a textbook. At Moss' hurried approach, the operator looked up, noticed the pallor of the lieutenant's face and asked what was wrong.

"Nothing, Bates. Just tell the Captain, if he calls in, that I've gone over to Martel's place, will you?"

"Sure thing," Bates agreed.

"TELL me, Moss," Captain Casey said, a little after midnight, "have you been drinking?" One steely gray eye was lost in a cynical squint, the other fastened itself upon the harried lieutenant's drawn face. "Bloody footprints — snapshots of demons—bah! Do you hear me, Moss? Bah!"

"I'm sorry, sir. I realize how it must sound to you, but I've told the truth to the best of my ability, sir." As if in an effort to wipe out some memory, he passed one hand over his face.

The Captain grunted. One of his best men, too! "If you need a few days off, I'll put Gregory in charge."

"I'd rather stay on the case, Captain. I'm afraid I would get little enough rest with the thought of—that—behind me. If you'd look at the picture, sir—"

Captain Casey made an uncomplimentary sound with his tongue, but he nodded brusquely. "All right, I'll humor you. Send them here to the house. I'll look at them just to show you how asinine this whole thing is. A good night's sleep you're ruining for me, Moss. But send them over, by all means!"

IT WAS perhaps an hour later that Captain Casey launched himself into the presence of Lieutenant Moss. He could not unbend so far as to tell the occurrences of the past half hour, but that he was a changed man was undeniable. His face, no longer so thoroughly cynical, showed rather dreadful ravages.

"You might have come over, yourself," Captain Casey said, not without bitterness. "What the devil is it, Moss? Do you have any notion? Is it what you said —a demon—or have I gone stark, staring mad?"

"When you had looked at the pictures," Moss said, "afterwards —did anything happen?"

Captain Casey turned one haggard eye upon his subordinate. "It did."

"Was is as I said?"

"In God's name, don't speak of it, man! Give me a minute to consult with St. Patrick!"

Moss let that go by. "I think the thing to do is find out about this from the owner of the pictures."

"That witness, you mean?" Casey asked, glancing once more, with obvious unease, behind his left shoulder. "If she has anything to do with this, she shouldn't be let loose among God-fearing people, I can tell you!"

"It will have to wait until morning. It's well after one, and she's probably sleeping," Moss said.

"Get her down here. If I can't sleep—and I probably never will again—why should she? Get her, I say!"

MISS SENSHAW was indignant. It was late and she needed her sleep. She had a job waiting for her in the morning and her employer did not tolerate tardiness. She thought that the young lieutenant was far more haggard than the lateness of the hour would seem to warrant. And the Captain looked like a surly old bear. For no reason she could define, Lydia began to feel frightened.

"Sit down," Captain Casey said gruffly. "I have a few questions to ask you and I want straight answers, young lady!"

Lydia sat. And then her eye fell upon the pictures spread out upon the desk. A pleased smile drove the gloom from her small face. "You found them!" she exclaimed to Lieutenant Moss. "May I have them now?"

"Don't even touch them!" Captain Casey barked, snatching for the pictures.

"But they're mine!" Lydia protested.

"Miss Senshaw," Lieutenant Moss interrupted hastily, "we have reason to feel—the Captain and myself—that there is danger attached to certain of these pictures: the ones you took of the tower. I think the others are harmless enough, but if there is anything you can tell us about that tower, whether you noticed anything at all—well, alien to the scene. . . ."

"But I told you, Lieutenant. The pictures were taken at Point Desmond. It's on the coast of

Maine, a private property belonging to an uncle of mine. The tower is a hideous old thing, but outside of that there is nothing but those old stones lying about. I can't understand your ferocious attitude." She added, turning to Captain Casey, "we did no harm that I know of."

The Captain was studying her intently, trying to establish in his own mind whether this child could have any possible connection with that abominable horror. He could not bring himself to believe it. He looked at Moss, who looked back, at a loss. Very slightly, he shook his head.

"This Point Desmond, Miss Senshaw," Casey said grimly, "is it open to the public? That is, are these ruins often visited by sightseers like yourselves?"

Lydia looked a little puzzled. "Certainly not. It is private land, very heavily wooded. The ruins are known thereabouts, but no one cares to inspect them, not only because of trespass, but because for years there has been a local legend that the place is haunted." She laughed a little and threw them a look of chagrin. "I might confess to trespassing, myself, since my uncle has expressly forbidden me to visit the tower. There was some trouble, a while ago, and since then Uncle Ambrose has spent much of his time abroad. Perhaps it is really haunted. Certainly the place has an oppressive atmosphere. We did not stay long after we took the pictures. I had the strangest feeling that we were being followed, but after I dropped the roll of film into the mail, the feeling just—evaporated. Silly of me, wasn't it?"

Captain Casey did not reply at once. Instead, he sorted through the pictures, removing the only two showing a view of the tower. The others he handed to Miss Senshaw. He said, "I'm taking the liberty of removing those views of the tower, Miss. Will you accept my apologies for disturbing you—and believe me when I say I hope you will never visit that place again? There is evil there. I may even say that you have escaped it by the narrowest of margins. And for whatever purpose, it has attached itself to the pictures of its haunt. I don't know why. The pictures you now have are harmless enough, to the best of my knowledge. But if you should experience the least disturbance, remember there is safety in numbers."

"Thank you," Miss Senshaw said, looking completely bewildered. "I'll remember."

WHEN she had gone, Lieutenant Moss said, "I hope you're right, Captain. I'm inclined to agree with you about the others, but how about these

two? I'll confess I wouldn't care to spend the night with them in my possession."

"Nor I. Call Havens in. I want these enlarged. And Lieutenant—better keep him company. I don't want any more of my men complaining of—well, let's say no more. On second thought, I'll come, too!"

Less than an hour later, Captain Casey clutched at an enlargement of the clearer picture of the tower. "That's it!" he whispered hoarsely, trying not to look at the enlarged version of the croucher in the doorway. "Look here, Moss, at the archway: the inscription running round it. Do you make out what it says?"

Lieutenant Moss, likewise avoiding the horror on the stair, studied the picture. He translated laboriously from the Latin: *Guard that which is given into thy keeping, nor show thyself.*

Police photographer Havens broke in with a forceful if respectful complaint: "Can't we hurry it up out of here, Captain? It's colder than death warmed over!"

Captain Casey preceded Moss from the room, Havens following closely after. He wanted, did Havens, an explanation for what he had seen, but from the set of the Captain's jaw, he was not likely to get one. Havens shivered. Perhaps there were some things better left unexplained. . . .

In his office, Captain Casey applied a match to the photographs and stirred them about in the metal tray until nothing remained but a charred residue.

"Let's hope that is sufficient to exorcise that particular ghost," he said fervently.

"We should know by morning," Moss replied with half-hearted levity. "What I can't understand is how it knew it would appear on the prints; how it knew where to find them, so far from home, one might say. And the blast of heat Miss Senshaw said she felt, while I experienced nothing but an abysmal chill. . . ."

"If you had seen it as I did," Captain Casey said grimly, "you'd wonder at nothing for the rest of your life. That was a very lucky girl, that Miss Senshaw."

Lieutenant Moss agreed. He was unusually tired and he wanted to go home. "About my report, Captain," he said, "how shall I explain the cause of Martel's death?"

The captain clapped hat to head on his way through the door. "Just say: murder at the hands of person or persons unknown."

Even Captain Casey preferred demotion to explaining the truth to the Inspector.

# PASSING OF A GOD

BY

HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

. . . worked up a considerable intimacy with snake worship.

"YOU say that when Carswell came into your hospital over in Port au Prince his fingers looked as though they had been wound with string," said I, encouragingly.

"It is a very ugly story, that, Canevin," replied Doctor Pelletier, still reluctant, it appeared.

"You promised to tell me," I threw in.

"I know it, Canevin," admitted Doctor Pelletier of the U. S. Navy Medical Corps, now stationed here in the Virgin Islands. "But," he proceeded, "you couldn't use this story, anyhow. There are editorial *taboos*, aren't there? The thing is too—what shall I say?—too outrageous, too incredible."

"Yes," I admitted in turn, "there are *taboos*, plenty of them. Still, after hearing about those fingers, as though wound with string—why not give me the story, Pelletier; leave it to me whether or not I 'use' it. It's the story I want, mostly. I'm burning up for it!"

"I suppose it's your lookout," said my guest. "If you find it too gruesome for you, tell me and I'll quit."

I plucked up hope once more. I had been trying for this story, after getting little scraps of it which allured and intrigued me, for weeks.

"Start in," I ventured, soothingly, pushing the silver swizzel-jug after the humidor of cigarettes from which Pelletier was even now making a selection. Pelletier helped himself to the swizzel frowningly. Evidently he was torn between the desire to pour out the story of Arthur Carswell and some complication of feelings against doing so. I sat back

in my wicker lounge-chair and waited.

Pelletier moved his large bulk about in his chair. Plainly now he was cogitating how to open the tale. He began, meditatively.

"I DON'T know as I ever heard public discussion of the malignant bodily growths except among medical people. Science knows little about them. The fact of such diseases, though, is well known to everybody, through campaigns of prevention, the life insurance companies, appeals for funds.

"Well, Carswell's case, primarily, is one of those cases."

He paused and gazed into the glowing end of his cigarette.

" 'Primarily?' " I threw in encouragingly.

"Yes. Speaking as a surgeon, that's where this thing begins, I suppose."

I kept still, waiting.

"Have you read Seabrook's book, *The Magic Island,* Canevin?" asked Pelletier suddenly.

"Yes," I answered. "What about it?"

"Then I suppose that from your own experience knocking around the West Indies and your study of it all, a good bit of that stuff of Seabrook's is familiar to you isn't it?—the *vodu,* and the hill customs, and all the rest of it, especially over in Haiti—you could check up on a writer like Seabrook, couldn't you, more or less?"

"Yes," said I, "practically all of it was an old story to me—a very fine piece of work, however, the thing clicks all the way through — an honest and thorough piece of investigation."

"Anything in it new to you?"

"Yes — Seabrook's statement that there was an exchange of personalities between the sacrificial goat—at the 'baptism'—and the young Black girl, the chapter he calls: *Girl-Cry—Goat-Cry.* That, at least, was a new one on me, I admit.

"You will recall, if you read it carefully, that he attributed that phenomenon to his own personal 'slant' on the thing. Isn't that the case, Canevin?"

"Yes," I agreed, "I think that is the way he put it."

"Then," resumed Doctor Pelletier, "I take it that all that material of his—I notice that there have been a lot of story-writers using his terms lately!—is sufficiently familiar to you so that you have some clear idea of the Haitian-African demigods, like Ogoun Badagris, Damballa, and the others, taking up their residence for a short time in some devotee?"

"THE idea is very well understood," said I. "Mr. Seabrook mentions it among a

number of other local phenomena. It was an old Negro who came up to him while he was eating, thrust his soiled hands into the dishes of food, surprised him considerably—then was surrounded by worshippers who took him to the nearest *houmfort* or *vodu*-house, let him sit on the altar, brought him food, hung all their jewelry on him, worshipped him for the time being; then, characteristically, quite utterly ignored the original old fellow after the 'possession' on the part of the 'deity' ceased and reduced him to an unimportant old pantaloon as he was before."

"That summarizes it exactly," agreed Doctor Pelletier. "That, Canevin, that kind of thing, I mean, is the real starting-place of this dreadful matter of Arthur Carswell."

"You mean—?" I barged out at Pelletier, vastly intrigued. I had had no idea that there was *vodu* mixed in with the case.

"I mean that Arthur Carswell's first intimation that there was anything pressingly wrong with him was just such a 'possession' as the one you have recounted."

"But—but," I protested, "I had supposed— I had every reason to believe, that it was a surgical matter! Why, you just objected to telling about it on the ground that—"

"Precisely," said Doctor Pelletier, calmly. "It was such a surgical case, but, as I say, it *began* in much the same way as the 'occupation' of that old Negro's body by Ogoun Badagris or whichever one of their devilish deities that happened to be, just as, you say, is well known to fellows like yourself who go in for such things, and just as Seabrook recorded it."

"Well," I said I, "you go ahead in your own way, Pelletier. I'll do my best to listen. Do you mind an occasional question?"

"Not in the least," said Doctor Pelletier considerately, shifted himself to a still more pronouncedly recumbent position in my Chinese rattan lounge-chair, lit a fresh cigarette, and proceeded:

"CARSWELL had worked up a considerable intimacy with the snake-worship of interior Haiti, all the sort of thing familiar to you; the sort of thing set out, probably for the first time in English at least, in Seabrook's book; all the gatherings, and the 'baptism,' and the sacrifices of the fowls and the bull, and the goats; the orgies of the worshippers, the boom and thrill of the *rata* drums—all that strange, incomprehensible, rather silly - surfaced, deadly - underneathed worship of 'the Snake'

which the Dahomeyans brought with them to old Hispaniola, now Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

"He had been there, as you may have heard, for a number of years; went there in the first place because everybody thought he was a kind of failure at home; made a good living, too, in a way nobody but an original-minded fellow like him would have thought of—shot ducks on the Léogane marshes, dried them, and exported them to New York and San Francisco to the United States' two largest Chinatowns.

"For a 'failure,' too, Carswell was a particularly smart-looking chap—smart, I mean, in the English sense of that word. He was one of those fellows who was always shaved, clean, freshly groomed, even under the rather adverse conditions of his living, there in Léogane by the salt marshes; and of his trade, which was to kill and dry ducks.

"A fellow can get pretty careless and let himself go at that sort of thing, away from 'home'; away, too, from such niceties as there are in a place like Port au Prince.

"He looked, in fact, like a fellow just off somebody's yacht the first time I saw him, there in the hospital in Port au Prince, and that, too, was right after a rather singular experience which would have unnerved or unsettled pretty nearly anybody.

"But not so old Carswell. No, indeed. I speak of him as 'Old Carswell,' Canevin. That, though, is a kind of affectionate term. He was somewhere about forty-five then; it was two years ago, you see, and, in addition to his being very spick and span, well groomed, you know he looked surprisingly young, somehow. One of those faces which showed experience, but, along with the experience, a philosophy. The lines in his face were *good* lines, if you get what I mean—lines of humor and courage; no dissipation, no let-down kind of lines, nothing of slackness such as you would see in the face of even a comparatively young beach-comber. No, as he strode into my office, almost jauntily, there in the hospital, there was nothing, nothing whatever, about him, to suggest anything else but a prosperous fellow American, a professional chap, for choice, who might, as I say, have just come ashore from somebody's yacht.

"And yet—good God, Canevin, the story that came out—"

Naval surgeon though he was, with service in Haiti, at sea, in Nicaragua and the China Station to his credit, Doctor Pelletier rose at this point, and, almost agitatedly, walked up and down

my gallery. Then he sat down and lit a fresh cigarette.

"There is," he said, reflectively, and as though weighing his words carefully, "there is, Canevin, among various others, a somewhat 'wild' theory that somebody put forward several years ago, about the origin of malignant tumors. It never gained very much approval among the medical profession, but it has, at least, the merit of originality, and—it was new. Because of those facts, it had a certain amount of currency, and there are those, in and out of medicine, who still believe in it. It is that there are certain nuclei, certain masses, so to speak, of the bodily material which have persisted—not generally, you understand, but in certain cases—among certain persons, the kind who are 'susceptible' to this horrible disease, which, in the pre-natal state, did not develop fully or normally—little places in the bodily structure, that is—if I make myself clear?—which remain undeveloped.

"Something, according to this hypothesis, something like a sudden jar, or a bruise, a kick, a blow with the fist, the result of a fall, or whatnot, causes traumatism—physical injury, that is, you know—to one of the focus-places, and the undeveloped little mass of material starts in to grow, and so displaces the normal tissue which surrounds it.

"One objection to the theory is that there are at least two varieties, well-known and recognized scientifically; the carcinoma, which is itself subdivided into two kinds, the hard and the soft carcinoma, and the sarcoma, which is a soft thing, like what is popularly understood by a 'tumor.' Of course they are all 'tumors,' particular kinds of tumors, malignant tumors. What lends a certain credibility to the theory I have just mentioned is the malignancy, the growing element. For, whatever the underlying reason, they grow, Canevin, as is well recognized, and this explanation I have been talking about gives a reason for the growth. The 'malignancy' is, really, that one of the things seems to have, as it were, its own life. All this, probably, you know?"

I NODDED. I did not wish to interrupt. I could see that this side-issue on a scientific by-path must have something to do with the story of Carswell.

"Now," resumed Pelletier, "notice this fact, Canevin. Let me put it in the form of a question, like this: To what kind, or type, of *vodu* worshipper, does the 'possession' by one of their deities occur—from your own

knowledge of such things, what would you say?"

"To the incomplete; the abnormal, to an *old* man, or woman," said I, slowly, reflecting, "or—to a child, or, perhaps, to an idiot. Idiots, ancient crones, backward children, 'town-fools' and the like, all over Europe, are supposed to be in some mysterious way *en rapport* with deity—or with Satan! It is an established peasant belief. Even among the Mahometans, the moron or idiot is 'the afflicted of God.' There is no other better established belief along such lines of thought."

"Precisely!" exclaimed Pelletier, "and, Canevin, go back once more to Seabrook's instance that we spoke about. What type of person was 'possessed?' "

"An old doddering man," said I, "one well gone in his dotage apparently."

"Right once more! Note now, two things. First, I will admit to you, Canevin, that that theory I have just been expounding never made much of a hit with me. It might be true, but—very few first-rate men in our profession thought much of it, and I followed that negative lead and didn't think much of it, or, indeed, much about it. I put it down to the vaporings of the theorist who first thought it out and published it, and let it go at that. Now, Canevin, *I am convinced that it is true!* The second thing, then: When Carswell came into my office in the hospital over there in Port au Prince, the first thing I noticed about him—I had never seen him before, you see—was a peculiar, almost an indescribable, discrepancy. It was between his general appearance of weather-worn cleanliness, general fitness, his 'smart' appearance in his clothes—all that, which fitted together about the clean-cut, open character of the fellow; and what I can only describe as a pursiness. He seemed in good condition, I mean to say, and yet—there was something, somehow, *flabby* somewhere in his make-up. I couldn't put my finger on it, but—it was there, a suggestion of something that detracted from the impression he gave as being an upstanding fellow, a good-fellow-to-have-beside-you-in-a-pinch—that kind of person.

"THE second thing I noticed, it was just after he had taken a chair beside my desk, was his fingers, and thumbs. They were swollen, Canevin, looked sore, as though they had been wound with string. That was the first thing I thought of, being wound with string. He saw me looking at them, held them out to me abruptly, laid them side by side—his hands I

mean—on my desk, and smiled at me.

" 'I see you have noticed them, Doctor,' he remarked, almost jovially. 'That makes it a little easier for me to tell you what I'm here for. It's—well, you might put it down as a "symptom".'

"I looked at his fingers and thumbs; every one of them was affected in the same way; and ended up with putting a magnifying glass over them.

"They were all bruised and reddened, and here and there on several of them, the skin was abraded, broken, *circularly*—it was a most curious-looking set of digits. My new patient was addressing me again:

" 'I'm not here to ask you riddles, Doctor,' he said, gravely, this time, 'but—would you care to make a guess at what did that to my fingers and thumbs?"

" 'Well,' I came back at him, 'without knowing what's happened, it *looks* as if you'd been trying to wear about a hundred rings, all at one time, and most of them didn't fit!'

"Carswell nodded his head at me. 'Score one for the medico,' said he, and laughed. 'Even numerically you're almost on the dot, sir. The precise number was one hundred and six!'

"I confess, I stared at him then. But he wasn't fooling. It was a cold, sober, serious fact that he was stating; only, he saw that it had a humorous side, and that intrigued him, as anything humorous always did, I found out after I got to know Carswell a lot better than I did then."

"You said you wouldn't mind a few questions, Pelletier," I interjected.

"Fire away," said Pelletier. "Do you see any light, so far?"

"I was naturally figuring along with you, as you told about it all," said I. "Do you infer correctly that Carswell, having lived there, how long, four or five years or so?—"

"Seven, to be exact," put in Pelletier.

"—that Carswell, being pretty familiar with the native doings, had mixed into things, got the confidence of his Black neighbors in and around Léogane, become somewhat 'adept,' had the run of the *houmforts,* so to speak—*'votre bougie, M'sieu'*—the fortune-telling at the festivals and so forth, and—had been 'visited' by one of the Black deities? That, apparently, if I'm any judge of tendencies, is what your account seems to be leading up to. Those bruised fingers—the one hundred and six rings—good heavens, man, is it really possible?"

"CARSWELL told me all about that end of it, a little later—yes, that was, precisely,

what happened, but—that, surprising incredible as it seems, is only the small end of it all. You just wait—"

"Go ahead," said I, "I am all ears, I assure you!"

"Well, Carswell took his hands off the desk after I had looked at them through my magnifying glass, and then waved one of them at me in a kind of deprecating gesture.

" 'I'll go into all that, if you're interested to hear about it, Doctor,' he assured me, 'but that isn't what I'm here about.' His face grew suddenly very grave. 'Have you plenty of time?' he asked. 'I don't want to let my case interfere with anything.'

" 'Fire ahead,' says I, and he leaned forward in his chair.

" 'Doctor,' says he, 'I don't know whether or not you ever heard of me before. My name's Carswell, and I live over Léogane way. I'm an American, like yourself, as you can probably see, and, even after seven years of it, out there, duck-hunting, mostly, with virtually no White-man's doings for a pretty long time, I haven't "gone native" or anything of the sort. I wouldn't want you to think I'm one of those wasters.' He looked up at me inquiringly for my estimate of him. He had been by himself a good deal; perhaps too much. I nodded at him. He looked me in the eye, squarely, and nodded back. 'I guess we understand each other,' he said. Then he went on.

" 'Seven years ago, it was, I came down here. I've lived over there ever since. What few people know about me regard me as a kind of failure, I daresay. But —Doctor, there was a reason for that, a pretty definite reason. I won't go into it beyond your end of it—the medical end, I mean. I came down because of this.'

"He stood up then, and I saw what made that 'discrepancy' I spoke about, that 'flabbiness' which went so ill with the general cut of the man. He turned up the lower ends of his white drill jacket and put his hand a little to the left of the middle of his stomach. 'Just notice this,' he said, and stepped toward me.

"There, just over the left center of that area and extending up toward the spleen, on the left side, you know, there was a protuberance. Seen closely it was apparent that here was some sort of internal growth. It was that which made him look flabby, stomachish.

" 'This was diagnosed for me in New York,' Carswell explained, 'a little more than seven years ago. They told me it was inoperable then. After seven years, probably, I daresay it's worse, if anything. To put the thing in a nutshell, Doctor, I had

to "let go" then. I got out of a promising business, broke off my engagement, came here. I won't expatiate on it all, but—it was pretty tough, Doctor, pretty tough. I've lasted all right, so far. It hasn't troubled me—until just lately. That's why I drove in this afternoon, to see you, to see if anything could be done.'

" 'Has it been kicking up lately?' I asked him.

" 'Yes,' said Carswell, simply. 'They said it would kill me, probably within a year or so, as it grew. It hasn't grown—much. I've lasted a little more than seven years, so far.'

" 'Come in to the operating-room,' I invited him, 'and take your clothes off, and let's get a good look at it.'

" 'Anything you say,' returned Carswell, and followed me back into the operating-room then and there.

"I had a good look at Carswell, first, superficially. That preliminary examination revealed a growth quite typical, the self-contained, not the 'fibrous' type, in the location I've already described, and about the size of an average man's head. It lay imbedded, fairly deep. It was what we call 'encapsulated.' That, of course, is what had kept Carswell alive.

"Then we put the X-rays on it, fore-and-aft, and sidewise. One of those things doesn't always respond very well to skiagraphic examination, to the X-ray, that is, but this one showed clearly enough. Inside it appeared a kind of dark, triangular mass, with the small end at the top. When Doctor Smithson and I had looked him over thoroughly, I asked Carswell whether or not he wanted to stay with us, to come into the hospital as a patient, for treatment.

" 'I'm quite in your hands, Doctor,' he told me. 'I'll stay, or do whatever you want me to. But, first,' and for the first time he looked a trifle embarrassed, 'I think I'd better tell you the story that goes with my coming here! However, speaking plainly, do you think I have a chance?'

" 'Well,' said I, 'speaking plainly, yes, there is a chance, maybe a "fifty-fifty" chance, maybe a little less. On the one hand, this thing has been let alone for seven years since original diagnosis. It's probably less operable than it was when you were in New York. On the other hand, we know a lot more, not about these things, Mr. Carswell, but about surgical technique, than they did seven years ago. On the whole, I'd advise you to stay and get ready for an operation, and, say about "forty-sixty" you'll go back to Léogane, or back to New York if you feel like it, several pounds lighter in weight and a new man. If it

takes you, on the table, well, you've had a lot more time out there gunning for ducks in Léogane than those New York fellows allowed you.'

" 'I'm with you,' said Carswell, and we assigned him a room, took his 'history,' and began to get him ready for his operation.

"WE DID the operation two days later, at ten-thirty in the morning, and in the meantime Carswell told me his 'story' about it.

"It seems that he had made quite a place for himself, there in Léogane, among the Negroes and the ducks. In seven years a man like Carswell, with his mental and dispositional equipment, can go quite a long way, anywhere. He had managed to make quite a good thing out of his duck-drying industry, employed five or six 'hands' in his little wooden 'factory,' rebuilt a rather good house he had secured there for a song right after he had arrived, collected local antiques to add to the equipment he had brought along with him, made himself a real home of a peculiar, bachelor kind, and, above all, got in solid with the Black People all around him. Almost incidentally I gathered from him—he had no gift of narrative, and I had to question him a great deal—he had got onto, and into, the know in the *vodu* thing. There wasn't, as far as I could get it, any aspect of it all that he hadn't been in on, except, that is, *'la chevre sans cornes'*—the goat without horns, you know—the human sacrifice on great occasions. In fact, he strenuously denied that the *voduists* resorted to that; said it was a *canard* against them; that they never, really, did such things, never had, unless back in pre-historic times, in Guinea—Africa.

"But, there wasn't anything about it all that he hadn't at his very finger-ends, and at first-hand, too. The man was a walking encyclopedia of the native beliefs, customs, and practises. He knew, too, every turn and twist of their speech. He hadn't, as he had said at first, 'gone native' in the slightest degree, and yet, without lowering his White Man's dignity by a trifle, he had got it all.

"That brings us to the specific happening, the 'story' which, he had said, went along with his reason for coming in to the hospital in Port au Prince, to us.

"It appears that his sarcoma had never, practically, troubled. Beyond noting a very gradual increase in its size from year to year, he said, he 'wouldn't know he had one.' In other words, characteristically, it never gave him any pain or direct annoyance beyond the sense of the

wretched thing being there, and increasing on him, and always drawing him closer to that end of life which the New York doctors had warned him about.

"Then, it had happened only three days before he came to the hospital, he had gone suddenly unconscious one afternoon, as he was walking down his shell path to his gateway. The last thing he remembered then was being 'about four steps from the gate.' When he woke up, it was dark. He was seated in a big chair on his own front gallery, and the first thing he noticed was that his fingers and thumbs were sore and ached very painfully. The next thing was that there were flares burning all along the edge of the gallery, and down in the front yard, and along the road outside the paling fence that divided his property from the road, and in the light of these flares there swarmed literally hundreds of Negroes, gathered about him and mostly on their knees; lined along the gallery and on the grounds below it; prostrating themselves, chanting, putting earth and sand on their heads; and, when he leaned back in his chair, something hurt the back of his neck, and he found that he was being nearly choked with the necklaces, strings of beads, gold and silver coin-strings, and other kinds, that had been draped over his head. His fingers, and the thumbs as well, were covered with gold and silver rings, many of them jammed on so as to stop the circulation.

"From his knowledge of their beliefs, he recognized what had happened to him. He had, he figured, probably fainted, although such a thing was not at all common with him, going down the pathway to the yard gate, and the Blacks had supposed him to be possessed as he had several times seen Black people, children, old men and women, morons, chiefly, similarly 'possessed.' He knew that, now that he was recovered from whatever had happened to him, the 'worship' ought to cease and if he simply sat quiet and took what was coming to him, they would, as soon as they realized he was 'himself' once more, leave him alone and he would get some relief from this uncomfortable set of surroundings; get rid of the necklaces and the rings; get a little privacy.

"But—the queer part of it all was that they didn't quit. No, the mob around the house and on the gallery increased rather than diminished, and at last he was put to it, from sheer discomfort—he said he came to the point where he felt he couldn't stand it all another instant—to speak up and ask the people to leave him in peace.

"THEY left him, he says, at that, immediately, without a protesting voice, but—and here was what started him on his major puzzlement—they didn't take off the necklaces and rings. No—they left the whole set of that metallic drapery which they had hung and thrust upon him right there, and, after he had been left alone, as he had requested, and had gone into his house, and lifted off the necklaces and worked the rings loose, the next thing that happened was that old Pa'p Josef, the local *papaloi,* together with three or four other neighboring *papalois,* witch-doctors from near-by villages, and followed by a very old man who was known to Carswell as the *hougan* or head witch-doctor of the whole countryside thereabouts, came in to him in a kind of procession, and knelt down all around him on the floor of his living room, and laid down gourds of cream and bottles of red rum and cooked chickens, and even a big china bowl of Tannia soup—a dish he abominated, said it always tasted like soapy water to him!—and then backed out leaving him to these comestibles.

"He said that this sort of attention persisted in his case, right through the three days that he remained in his house in Léogane, before he started out for the hospital; would, apparently, be still going on if he hadn't come in to Port au Prince to us.

"But—his coming in was not, in the least, because of this. It had puzzled him a great deal, for there was nothing like it in his experience, nor, so far as he could gather from their attitude, in the experience of the people about him, of the *papalois,* or even of the *hougan* himself. They acted, in other words, precisely as though the 'deity' supposed to have taken up his abode within him had remained there, although there seemed no precedent for such an occurrence, and, so far as he knew, he felt precisely just as he had felt right along, that is, fully awake, and, certainly, not in anything like an abnormal condition, and, very positively, not in anything like a fainting-fit!

"THAT is to say, he felt precisely the same as usual except that—he attributed it to the probability that he must have fallen on the ground that time when he lost consciousness going down the pathway to the gate (he had been told that passers-by had picked him up and carried him to the gallery where he had awakened, later, these Good Samaritans meanwhile recognizing that one of the 'deities' had indwelt him)—he felt the same except for recurrent, almost un-

bearable pains in the vicinity of his lower abdominal region.

"There was nothing surprising to him in this accession of the new painfulness. He had been warned that that would be the beginning of the end. It was in the rather faint hope that something might be done that he had come in to the hospital. It speaks volumes for the man's fortitude, for his strength of character, that he came in so cheerfully; acquiesced in what we suggested to him to do; remained with us, facing these comparatively slim chances with complete cheerfulness.

"For—we did not deceive Carswell—the chances were somewhat slim. 'Sixty-forty' I had said, but as I afterward made clear to him, the favorable chances, as gleaned from the mortality tables, were a good deal less than that.

"He went to the table in a state of mind quite unchanged from his accustomed cheerfulness. He shook hands good-bye with Doctor Smithson and me, 'in case,' and also with Doctor Jackson, who acted as anesthetist.

"CARSWELL took an enormous amount of ether to get him off. His consciousness persisted longer, perhaps, than that of any surgical patient I can remember.

"At last, however, Dr. Jackson intimated to me that I might begin, and, Doctor Smithson standing by with the retracting forceps, I made the first incision. It was my intention, after careful study of the X-ray plates, to open it up from in front, in an up-and-down direction, establish drainage directly, and, leaving the wound in the sound tissue in front of it open, to attempt to get it healed up after removing its contents. Such is the technique of the major portion of successful operations.

"It was a comparatively simple matter to expose the outer wall. This accomplished, and after a few words of consultation with my colleague, I very carefully opened it. We recalled that the X-ray had shown, as I mentioned, a triangular-shaped mass within. This apparent content we attributed to some obscure chemical coloration of the contents.

"I made my incisions with the greatest care and delicacy, of course. The critical part of the operation lay right at this point, and the greatest exactitude was indicated.

"At last the outer coats of it were cut through, and retracted, and with renewed caution I made the incision through the inmost wall of tissue. To my surprise, and to Doctor Smithson's, the inside was comparatively dry. The gauze which the nurse

attending had caused to follow the path of the knife, was hardly moistened. I ran my knife down below the original scope of that last incision, then upward from its upper extremity, greatly lengthening the incision as a whole, if you are following me.

"Then, reaching my gloved hand within this long up-and-down aperture, I felt about and at once discovered that I could get my fingers in around the inner containing wall quite easily. I reached and worked my fingers in farther and farther, finally getting both hands inside and at last feeling my fingers touch inside the posterior or rear wall. Rapidly, now, I ran the edges of my hands around inside, and, quite easily, lifted out the 'inside.' This, a mass weighing several pounds, of more or less solid material, was laid aside on the small table beside the operating-table, and, again pausing to consult with Doctor Smithson—the operation was going, you see, a lot better than either of us had dared to anticipate—and being encouraged by him to proceed to a radical step which we had not hoped to be able to take, I began the dissection from the surrounding, normal tissue of the now collapsed walls. This, a long, difficult, and harassing job, was accomplished at the end of, perhaps, ten or twelve minutes of gruelling work, and the bag-like thing, now completely severed from the tissues in which it had been for so long imbedded, was placed also on the side table.

"Doctor Jackson reporting favorably on our patient's condition under the anesthetic, I now proceeded to dress the large aperture, and to close the body-wound. This was accomplished in a routine manner, and then, together, we bandaged Carswell, and he was taken back to his room to await awakening from the ether.

"Carswell disposed of, Doctor Jackson and Doctor Smithson left the operating-room and the nurse started in cleaning up after the operation; dropping the instruments into the boiler, and so on—a routine set of duties. As for me, I picked up the shell in a pair of forceps, turned it about under the strong electric operating-light, and laid it down again. It presented nothing of interest for a possible laboratory examination.

"Then I picked up the more or less solid contents which I had laid, very hastily, and without looking at it—you see, my actual removal of it had been done inside, in the dark for the most part and by the sense of feeling, with my hands, you will remember—I picked it up; I still had my operating-gloves on to prevent infection when looking

over these specimens, and, still, not looking at it particularly, carried it out into the laboratory.

"Canevin"—Doctor Pelletier looked at me somberly through the very gradually fading light of late afternoon, the period just before the abrupt falling of our tropic dusk—"Canevin," he repeated, "honestly, I don't know how to tell you! Listen now, old man, do something for me, will you?"

"Why, yes—of course," said I, considerably mystified. "What is it you want me to do, Pelletier?"

"My car is out in front of the house. Come on home with me, up to my house, will you? Let's say I want to give you a cocktail! Anyhow, maybe you'll understand better when you are there; I want to tell you the rest up at my house, not here. Will you please come, Canevin?"

I looked at him closely. This seemed to me a very strange, an abrupt, request. Still, there was nothing whatever unreasonable about such a sudden whim on Pelletier's part.

"Why, yes, certainly I'll go with you, Pelletier, if you want me to."

"Come on, then," said Pelletier, and we started for his car.

The doctor drove himself, and after we had taken the first turn in the rather complicated route from my house to his, on the extreme airy top of Denmark Hill, he said, in a quiet voice:

"Put together, now, Canevin, certain points if you please, in this story. Note, kindly, how the Black people over in Léogane acted, according to Carswell's story. Note, too, that theory I was telling you about; do you recollect it clearly?"

"Yes," said I, still more mystified.

"Just keep those two points in mind, then," added Doctor Pelletier, and devoted himself to navigating sharp turns and plodding up two steep roadways for the rest of the drive to his house.

WE WENT in and found his houseboy laying the table for his dinner. Doctor Pelletier is unmarried, keeps a hospitable bachelor establishment. He ordered cocktails, and the houseboy departed on this errand. Then he led me into a kind of office, littered with medical and surgical paraphernalia. He lifted some papers off a chair, motioned me into it, and took another near-by. "Listen, now!" he said, and held up a finger at me.

"I took that thing, as I mentioned, into the laboratory," said he. "I carried it in my hand, with my gloves still on, as aforesaid. I laid it down on a table and turned on a powerful light over it. It was only then that I took a good look at it. It weighed sev-

eral pounds at least, was about the bulk and heft of a full-grown coconut, and about the same color as a hulled coconut, that is, a kind of medium brown. As I looked at it, I saw that it was, as the X-ray had indicated, vaguely triangular in shape. It lay over on one of its sides under that powerful light, and—Canevin, so help me God"—Doctor Pelletier leaned toward me, his face working, a great seriousness in his eyes—"it moved, Canevin," he murmured; "and, as I looked—the thing *breathed!* I was just plain dumbfounded. A biological specimen like that—does not move, Canevin! I shook all over, suddenly. I felt my hair prickle on the roots of my scalp. I felt chills go down my spine.

Then I remembered that here I was, after an operation, in my own biological laboratory. I came close to the thing and propped it up, on what might be called its logical base, if you see what I mean, so that it stood as nearly upright as its triangular conformation permitted.

"THEN I saw that it had faint yellowish markings over the brown, and that what you might call its skin was moving, and—as I stared at the thing, Canevin—two things like little arms began to move, and the top of it gave a kind of convulsive shudder, and it opened straight at me, Canevin, a pair of eyes and looked me in the face.

"I stared dumbfounded."

"Those eyes—my God, Canevin, those eyes! They were eyes of something more than human, Canevin, something incredibly evil, something vastly old, sophisticated, cold, immune from anything except pure evil, the eyes of something that had been worshipped, Canevin, from ages and ages out of a past that went back before all known human calculation, eyes that showed all the deliberate, lurking wickedness that has ever been in the world. The eyes closed, Canevin, and the thing sank over onto its side, and heaved and shuddered convulsively.

"It was sick, Canevin; and now, emboldened, holding myself together, repeating over and over to myself that I had a case of the quavers, of post-operative 'nerves,' I forced myself to look closer, and as I did so I got from it a faint whiff of ether. Two tiny, ape-like nostrils, over a clamped-shut slit of a mouth, were exhaling and inhaling; drawing in the good, pure air, exhaling ether fumes. It popped into my head that Carswell had consumed a terrific amount of ether before he went under; we had commented on that, Doctor Jackson particularly. I put two and two together, Canevin, re-

membered we were in Haiti, where things are not like New York, or Boston, or Baltimore! Those Negroes had believed that the 'deity' had not come out of Carswell, do you see? *That* was the thing that held the edge of my mind. The thing stirred uneasily, put out one of its 'arms,' groped about, stiffened.

"I reached for a near-by specimen-jar, Canevin, reasoning, almost blindly, that if this thing were susceptible to—well, my gloves were still on my hands, and—now shuddering so that I could hardly move at all, I had to force every motion—I reached out and took hold of the thing—it felt like moist leather—and dropped it into the jar. Then I carried the carboy of preserving alcohol over to the table and poured it in till the ghastly thing was entirely covered, the alcohol near the top of the jar. It writhed once, then rolled over on its 'back,' and lay still, the mouth now open. Do you believe me, Canevin?"

"I have always said that I would believe anything, on proper evidence," said I, slowly, "and I would be the last to question a statement of yours, Pelletier. However, although I have, as you say, looked into some of these things perhaps more than most, it seems, well—"

Doctor Pelletier said nothing. Then he slowly got up out of his chair. He stepped over to a wall-cupboard and returned, a wide-mouthed specimen-jar in his hand. He laid the jar down before me, in silence.

I looked into it, through the slightly discolored alcohol with which the jar, tightly sealed with rubber-tape and sealing-wax, was filled nearly to the brim. There, on the jar's bottom, lay such a thing as Pelletier had described (a thing which, if it had been "seated," upright, would somewhat have resembled that representation of the happy little godling "Billiken" which was popular twenty years ago as a desk ornament), a thing suggesting the sinister, the unearthly, even in this dessicated form. I looked long at the thing.

"Excuse me for even seeming to hesitate, Pelletier," said I, reflectively.

"I can't say that I blame you," returned the genial doctor. "It is, by the way, the first and only time I have ever tried to tell the story to anybody."

"And Carswell?" I asked. "I've been intrigued with that good fellow and his difficulties. How did he come out of it all?"

"He made a magnificent recovery from the operation," said Pelletier, "and afterward, when he went back to Léogane, he told me that the Negroes, while glad to see him quite as usual, had

quite lost interest in him as the throne of a 'divinity.' "

"H'm," I remarked, "it would seem, that, to bear out—"

"Yes," said Pelletier, "I have always regarded that fact as absolutely conclusive. Indeed, how otherwise could one possibly account for—*this?*" He indicated the contents of the laboratory jar.

I nodded my head, in agreement with him. "I can only say that—if you won't feel insulted, Pelletier—that you are singularly open-minded, for a man of science! What, by the way, became of Carswell?"

The houseboy came in with a tray, and Pelletier and I drank to each other's good health.

"He came in to Port au Prince," replied Pelletier after he had done the honors. "He did not want to go back to the States, he said. The lady to whom he had been engaged had died a couple of years before; he felt that he would be out of touch with American business. The fact is—he had stayed out here too long, too continuously. But, he remains an 'authority' on Haitian native affairs, and is consulted by the High Commissioner. He knows, literally, more about Haiti than the Haitians themselves. I wish you might meet him; you'd have a lot in common."

"I'll hope to do that," said I, and rose to leave. The houseboy appeared at the door, smiling in my direction.

"The table is set for two, sir," said he.

DOCTOR PELLETIER led the way into the dining room, taking it for granted that I would remain and dine with him. We are informal in St. Thomas about such matters. I telephoned home and sat down with him.

Pelletier suddenly laughed—he was halfway through his soup at the moment. I looked up inquiringly. He put down his soup spoon and looked across the table at me.

"It's a bit odd," he remarked, "when you stop to think of it! There's one thing Carswell doesn't know about Haiti and what happens there!"

"What's that?" I inquired.

"That—thing—in there," said Pelletier, indicating the office with his thumb in the way artists and surgeons do. "I thought he'd had troubles enough without *that* on his mind, too."

I nodded in agreement and resumed my soup. Pelletier has a cook in a thousand. . . .

# Off the Map

***BY REX DOLPHIN***

EXCUSE my shivers, but it's good to sit down over a cigarette and recover my wits, and talk to someone who can perhaps persuade me that it never happened.

I often knock around about the countryside, looking out unusual and picturesque places, and one of my pleasures in an old English town is to haunt the second-hand bookshops in search of local lore.

See this? Yes, it's an old map—seventeenth century to be exact—and I found it in a musty old shop in a part of the country I'd better not mention. No, this has nothing to do with buried treasure, though to be truthful it does concern some golden guineas; guineas that no one will touch. Give you the chance? Maybe, but there's something you should know first.

Here on the map are three villages. Let's call them Burgholme, Wychburne and Ervington. Burgholme and Ervington you can still find on modern maps; you'll look in vain for Wychburne. Where has it gone, you ask? That's the whole point. . . .

As you see, Wychburne lay between the other two villages, but today's large-scale map will show you nothing but wild and waste land, moor, hill and bog. Intrigued by this, I searched en-

**Old maps showed three villages; new maps only two . . . . .**

cyclopedias and guide-books old and new, but not a word about Wychburne. There seemed to be a conspiracy of silence wrapped about the place, and I began to wonder if it had ever existed except in the old map-maker's imagination; or, due to the primitive cartographic methods of that day, it had been placed many miles from its true site and now bore a different name.

That disastrous curiosity made me take a train to the nearest town and hike six miles to Burgholme. This place was little more than a hamlet, with no church, chapel or pub. The weather that late summer afternoon was Novemberish, damp with a swirling mist, and the sun giving up his efforts in disgust.

AFTER the long walk the sudden ending of exercise made me chilly, and the need for refreshment was evident. I searched the dismal village for the usual battered and ill-written "TEAS" sign without which no English village however small is complete. There wasn't one in Burgholme.

So it would have to be a cottage. They all looked equally unfriendly. I picked one, and knocked at the door.

It was opened by a thin-faced middle-aged woman, who said: "Well?"

A ragged staring little girl appeared beside her, and in the background, a brawny farm-laborer.

"Excuse me, but can you provide me with a tea?" I said politely.

She didn't answer. Instead, the man came nearer, and said, in a pointedly unfriendly manner:

"What are you doing in Burgholme, anyway, mister? Nobody ever comes here."

Since I never dress in conventional hiker's kit, perhaps the question was understandable.

"Just hiking," I replied. "And I've got hungry and thirsty."

"Ha!" said the man. And they all looked at me as if I were a being from another world.

"I'll pay you well."

That turned the trick. "All right. Come in."

"Thanks."

It was a silent meal. All attempts at conversation failed. As I ate they sat and watched every movement of my face and hands; and though to be fair, the food was good and plentiful, it was the most uncomfortable meal I've ever had.

At the end I made one more attempt.

"What is the quickest way to Ervington?"

The inevitable answer: "Why d'you want to go to Ervington, Mister?"

"I'm just walking for pleasure

—seeing the countryside. Can't you understand that?"

"No." But he gave me the route to Ervington all the same. It was a roundabout way and entailed going backward to get forward.

"Can't I get there across country, then?" I asked.

"Not if you don't want to get lost."

"Surely there must be some sort of a footpath?" I asked. And then came what I had been leading up to: "After all, long ago there used to be a village—probably in ruins now—between here and Ervington. . . ."

A look, queer, as of suppressed horror, came to the faces of the man and woman.

". . . . a place called Wychburne. . . ."

The woman went dead white. The man made the Sign of the Cross and said in an unnatural voice:

"There are some places it don't do to talk about, mister. Better go."

"What's the matter with Wychburne?" I persisted.

The man got up, stood between me and his family.

"Go," he said, and almost pushed me through the doorway.

As I walked away I saw their terrified faces watching me from behind the curtain.

The air seemed to get grayer and colder as I passed the last few huddled cottages that marked the end of the village—the end that according to the old map led past the entrance to the Wychburne road. There was a sound now, that of shuffling and of sticks tapping on the pebbled road.

It came towards me. It came out of the swirling mist, a bent old man making wearily for home. He must have been eighty, to judge by his folded and lined face and deepset rheumy eyes which he turned questingly in my direction. His tattered black coat hung loosely on his body.

I stopped. So did his shuffling.

"Should there be," I said loudly, for I imagined he would certainly be deaf, "be a road leading to Wychburne somewhere along here?"

Dead silence for a few seconds, the silence of utter shock.

Then he dropped his sticks and ran—yes, this old man ran—towards the village. Hoppity-hop, like a crippled crow, his coat flapping about him.

My first feeling was to laugh, both at the idea and the spectacle. Then I checked myself. What, other than intense fear, could have given those withered legs wings? What was there about the mere name of Wychburne that inspired terror?

I shrugged my shoulders to myself, and persuaded myself that country superstitions—what-

ever they were in this case—were sheer nonsense. Well clear of the village now, I seemed to be in a deserted land. Getting out my maps, I checked my position. Yes, just around here, perhaps fifty yards along on the left, should be the road or track to Wychburne.

Then the mist closed about me like a blanket dropped over my head. This is where, if I hadn't been dead stupid or hungry with curiosity, I should have turned back to the comparative civilization of Burgholme. Instead, I searched around and found what seemed to be a rough track. I got out my compass, set a course, and went into the fog.

WHAT I had struck I don't know, but I stumbled over rocks, tore my trousers in thorn bushes, sank up to my ankles in squelch, tripped over what the folk in those parts call pot-holes, and fell flat on my face more than once. And all these hazards were invisible. Sweat poured off me from sheer pig-headedness and exhaustion.

How long this lasted I could not judge, but just as I said to myself, "Stop it, you fool, you're all in!" I seemed to come to the end of the difficulties and found beneath my feet a level although still stony track. All my strength flowed back.

Then, from far ahead in the mist, came the thin flowing notes of a fiddle, playing some kind of an old country jig. And, faintly, the ebb and flow of voices raised in revelry, as if Merrie England were here again.

The road led steeply down into the valley, but still nothing could be seen. The sounds of merriment got nearer and nearer, and finally I felt, "I'm here!"

Very gradually, the mist cleared, and there it was—Wychburne! A compact little village, nestling under the surrounding steep cliff-like hills, almost as if a giant had scooped out a spoonful of the earth's surface and dropped the village neatly into the cavity. The houses were grouped around a neat village green on which the fiddlers were playing and a merry crowd dancing. Girls and men, all dressed in the colorful clothes of Restoration days.

There wasn't a thing modern in the place, from the rose-covered timber-and-white cottages to the horse-wagons "parked" in the inn-yard. What could there be about this place to inspire terror? Wychburne was charming!

But what was its secret? Was it a "lost village"—a place that was unknown to outsiders, that had resisted the inroads of modern progress, had become cut off and was so completely self-contained as to be capable of

carrying on an independent existence? It was inaccessible enough, and its approaches certainly didn't invite visitors, let alone motor traffic. Surveyors, map - makers, census - takers, county planners—how could all these have overlooked its existence? Yet the fact remained that it didn't exist in present-day records!

The mist—perhaps that explained it. If Wychburne was permanently hidden from view both from land and air, all these things were conceivable.

I MOVED towards the inn-yard, stood looking at the scene, now close-up, and a strange feeling of timelessness and of not being myself came over me. Everything now was larger than life, over-intimate, and as I threaded among the people I saw their faces close to mine, felt the push of their bodies, and the air was full of their rich voices and laughter and snatches of song and music. There was, too, an indefinable odor—a thing one notices only among people of a different race.

Suddenly a face turned towards me, and eyes looked straight into mine. It was a heavy, countryman's face, but full of dignity and independence, and the wide-brimmed tall feathered hat added to its stature.

"What do ye here, stranger?" the man asked, in accents I'd never heard before.

"Travelling," I answered. "What goes on here, a carnival?"

"And whence come ye, stranger?"

"From London."

"From London!" he echoed, and there was a gasp in his voice. Then he shouted to the crowd, "The stranger comes from London!"

The crowd took up the words in a kind of prolonged echo: "From London! From London!"

The words hummed around for some seconds, then the music stopped. The laughter stopped. The voices stopped.

From a window above the inn a low wailing shriek started, gathering strength and building up to a horrible scream that ended abruptly in a choking sob. I looked, and saw that it had been uttered by a girl whose beautiful face now expressed final hopelessness.

A hundred faces seemed to turn in my direction, seemingly all accusing me of some awful crime. And indeed there was a feeling of guilt on me, but guilt of just what I didn't know, although I felt I should have knowledge.

The people now seemed to peel away from me, until I was left isolated on the green. The man who had spoken to me had

vanished; now he suddenly reappeared, at the head of a small group of purposeful-looking men.

They all bore long staves, and the foremost—my man—lunged at me with his, catching me a painful blow under the heart.

"What means this?" I gasped in anger. Fear was to come later.

"Begone, bringer of evil!" he roared.

THEN they all set about me with the staves, not one man coming near enough to touch me with his hands. Argument was futile. I turned and ran—ran while I still had brains in my head and whole bones in my legs.

Crash, crash, they hit me with their sticks as they pursued. I stumbled over rocks and tree-roots as I made the rough ascent out of the village in the opposite direction to that from which I had entered. I fell, was beaten all over, rose, ran, fell again—a deadly, killing repetition. In the middle of all this the mist closed about me again. And still those fiends hounded me. I must have run miles.

I fell for the last time. I was finished. I tried to rise. It was useless. A savage flurry of blows rained on my head. Then—blackout.

When I regained my senses I was lying flat, face down on the hard rock, soaked to the skin with mist and bruised all over. A few inches from my eyes, lying on the stony ground, was what I took at first to be a much-weathered halfpenny. I reached out for it painfully—I suppose it's a human instinct to pick up a coin however valueless—scraped it and rubbed it clean on my tattered sleeve.

I sat up sharply, my distress forgotten. It was a Charles II golden guinea! And there was another, and another! Five altogether I found, and the remnants of metal buckles, which seemed to argue a whole leather bagful of coins. The others were no doubt scattered around or buried. I told myself I would come back here later and search properly. Meantime my exhaustion had returned, and I had to get to shelter if I wasn't to die of exposure.

There was some sort of a track here, and I followed it as best I could. Presently, still with thick mist hiding everything, I felt my feet touch tarmac, and I pushed on, miles it seemed, till a glimmer ahead showed another village. This, I knew, must be Ervington, last of the three villages on the map.

A hanging sign, unreadable in the mist, appeared ahead, and below it the welcome warmth of lights; and soon I heard the friendly undertone of casual inn-

conversation. I walked in, feeling like a second-hand scarecrow that the crows have defeated.

The conversation stopped. The few customers, all seated, stared at me. The landlord, a shrewd-looking, puckered-faced short man, stopped polishing a glass. His look was enough question.

"Wychburne," I muttered. "What is Wychburne? Can anyone tell me? I've just got back. . . ."

The drinkers all stood up, as if drilled, edged their way round me one by one, and dashed out into the road. I gazed after them. When I looked back to the bar, the landlord had laid a double-barrelled shotgun meaningly across it, the snouts in my direction.

"Stay," he rasped. "Don't move an inch nearer my bar."

"Look," I said desperately, "I'm sick of these riddles. Everything that's happened since I arrived in these parts has been inexplicable. Do *you* know the answer?"

HE TWISTED a grin. "I'm no oracle, mister. But though I'm not as dumb as the local population, being a bit of a travelled man and partly educated, I still respect their superstitions. Let's see . . . somehow you heard of Wychburne? You tried to find it? You're a Londoner? You found Wychburne and they drove you out, nearly killing you in the process?"

I answered each question with a nod.

"Yes," he mused, "I suppose it was bound to happen one day."

"You've not quite finished," I pointed out.

"How, mister?"

I fished in my pocket. "Where I fell I found the remains of a leather bag, and these." I held up the gold pieces.

"My God, that as well? *So it isn't just a legend!*" The last words were muttered almost to himself.

He was scared.

"Yes—and now the explanation, man!" I pressed. "What is Wychburne?"

"There's no such place," he said. He lifted the bar-flap, picked up the gun, and grunted: "Go through that door and out into the backyard, quick!"

In no condition to argue with a shotgun, I obeyed.

"How can you say there's no such place?" I demanded. "After what I've just been through? And what's the meaning of this pantomime?"

"There was such a place. Not now. Get undressed."

*"What?"*

"Get undressed. Jump into that old butt. Don't argue, man. It's the best I can do for you. Good. Stay there a minute."

HE WENT across the cobbled yard to the back door; returned quickly carrying a can of liquid. He found a long stick, pushed my clothes, still containing the guineas, well away from me as I stood shivering in the empty barrel, and poured the fluid over them. It was kerosene, from the oily stench. A match, a sheet of smoky flame, and my clothes were ashes.

What was he going to do to *me?* So far I had believed him—he was by far the most rational being I'd met since arriving in the neighborhood—but now, was I dealing with a maniac?

Back into the house he went, coming out this time with a large jug, and a long hose which was still attached to something inside the house. He pointed the hose at me. . . . Something sprayed out. . . .

It was nothing more than water, but almost unbearably hot. "Soap coming over!" he called. "Catch!"

Then he poured the contents of the jug over me into the butt. A very powerful disinfectant, by the smell.

"Now wash!" he ordered. "As thoroughly as you can."

"All right," I spluttered. "You seem to know what you're doing, though it still beats me. Now you tell me all about Wychburne."

"Nearly three hundred years ago," he said slowly, "a traveller set out from London on a horse, carrying all his gold in a leather bag. He was escaping from something, and looking for an isolated country hide-out where he could stay till the trouble was over.

"Yes, he found Wychburne. He stayed at the inn there. The first to die was the innkeeper's daughter. They knew he was the cause. They chased him out of the village and beat him to death with the staves. The gold stayed with him. Nobody would touch it.

"In less than a week there wasn't a life left in Wychburne. The men of Ervington and Burgholme pitched oil, straw, and everything inflammable they could find, into Wychburne from the steep hills around it, and set fire to the whole village. Then they rolled boulders into it, and filled up the little valley with rocks and earth till not a sign of the village remained. That's the story, and it's known to every soul in the two villages—and until today by nobody else."

"But what happened to me?" I cried, shivering.

"That's anybody's guess, mister."

"And what—?" I began, but he'd vanished into the house again.

This time he came back with a rough outfit of clothes, shoes,

an old towel, half a bottle of brandy and some sandwiches.

"When you're dressed, get yourself to a doctor, and don't use any transport. You might be all right, but there's no telling."

"You mean I'm to walk?" I gasped.

"Sorry, mister. Yes."

"No chance of staying the night?"

"Ugh. Not likely. You see, these things happened in 1665—the year of the Great Plague."

Don't go, my friend. . . . Don't look at me like that . . . for God's sake. . . .

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## THE SURVIVOR

AMONG the papers of the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft were the notes and outline for a final story entitled, "The Survivor," which Lovecraft did not live to write, but which was very much in the Lovecraft tradition. These notes were put together by August Derleth who sent us the manuscript of the leading story in this issue—which he described as a "collaboration, post-mortem."

We are sure that it will be welcomed by old Lovecraft fans, and also by the younger readers who have been writing us to know all about Lovecraft and the genre in which he wrote and which so influenced many of his followers.

---

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
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*Your latest issue was received today, and it proved quite enjoyable; "Beyond the Door" and "Lord of Talking Hands" were very good.*

*I wish you would print this announcement: I am trying to start a sort of "spare-parts" bureau for old* WT. *Back in the twenties, almost everybody cut their favorite stories out of an issue and passed it on. As a result, there are thousands of stray ½ copies and ¼ copies wandering around fandom. I have recently bought quite a number, and wish more; with this stock, I shall endeavor to supply reasonably odd pages missing from fans' copies. Anyone wishing to buy, sell, or trade these will please write me. . . .*

*M. McNeil*
*5542 Tilbury Drive*
*Houston 19, Texas*

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